

Last Star 93

Star XXXIII ~ Cage ~ Part XI

“Excuse me!” - Avi shouted to the receptionist. - “My friend was here a moment ago! She has blue tentacle hair. Did you see her?”

The receptionist pointed at the eastern exit, and Avi ran there right away.

“Una! UNA!!!” - Avi called as she looked around. - “Come on!” - She cursed, then headed to the wheat fields, asking the guests about Una, but nobody revealed where she could be. After searching for a long time, fatigued and resigned, Avi sat on the bench and buried her face in her hands, while still holding a crumpled letter. - “What is it all supposed to mean...?” - She whispered to herself, then gazed at the now broken seal.

Avi took out the sheet of paper from the envelope and noticed that the ink was still fresh.

“Avi.” - The letter said. - “Two paths lie before you, both lead to doom. The Prison of Aeons is a trap designed to stop people like us. You can peacefully wait until your days run out, or try to escape. The first option requires me to reveal myself and neutralize the danger, which will also focus our mutual enemy's attention on me. You'll lose your freedom, but nobody you know will be hurt. The second option is a riot, which will completely overturn the order of this place, but it will allow us to cause significant damage to our mutual enemy. If you decided to stay here, ignore this letter and burn it. If you decided to leave, this afternoon, join the musical group number seventeen at room number one hundred and nine. I'll be waiting – Daichi.”

“Daichi.” - Avi uttered quietly. - “He had finally found me.”

Avi put her name on the list and hurried to the train, despite still having to wait until other prisoners gathered, then she was taken into a corridor to the deeper sections of the prison. When the train stopped, Avi rushed outside to the main hall, where, under a large chandelier, a few dozen other prisoners tried to sign up and pick up their instruments, or join as a listener without one.

Avi decided to pick a familiar acoustic guitar and, after agreeing to the clause on liability for equipment damage costs, headed to the corridor that led to soundproof recording rooms.

"A room number one hundred and nine. One hundred and nine." - Avi muttered repeatedly. When she arrived there, she pushed the door and entered a chamber covered in soft, sound-suppressing sponge. In the back of the room, behind rows of empty seats and glass screens, there was a lone alien in a snow-white outfit, sitting next to a piano. Although the musician had no visible facial features, her translucent, pale skin was concealing green-blue nerves and veins, and she had a halo over her head.

The alien was playing a slow, dramatic melody, as if she wanted to emphasize by it that the universe was about to end. Avi didn't interrupt her and took a seat, letting the performance end before they would talk. In the meantime, three other prisoners joined them, each with their own musical equipment. As the melody progressed, the notes became heavier and heavier until they became a furious crescendo, which raged like a storm and created a crushing atmosphere that pressed Avi into her seat. The song suddenly stopped, and the pianist looked at Avi, then waved her hand to invite her to the scene.

Avi hesitantly got up and walked up the small stairs to the back of the room, and once she was close, the alien pointed at the nearby table, asking her to sit in one of the chairs.

"Please, introduce yourself with the sound of your soul." - The pianist spoke.

"I don't think I can." - Avi admitted. - "I only know one song well."

"It's enough." - The pianist assured.

"...but it's a very personal melody to me. I wrote it for someone dear to me." - Avi tried her best to wriggle out of it.

"Will you introduce that person to us?" - The pianist asked.

"Her name is Luna. She's not a prisoner." - Avi admitted.

"Let your melody, just like the feeling you cherish her with, flow straight from the heart..." - The pianist insisted. - "...that way, you'll bring her memory into this place, and she'll be here with us."

Avi was nervous. - "Fine, I'll try..." - Her fingers plucked the strings gently, crafting a serene melody. After a moment, the pianist joined, improvising and enhancing the song with a dreamy undertone.

When Avi heard the slow notes change her melody, she felt uncomfortable, as if she was losing something intimate, reserved for only her and Luna. Despite the piano perfectly matching the tune, Avi felt like it was trying to steal or alter the identity of the song. There was something intrusive about it, as if the pianist wanted to point out that Avi's idea was just a dream, a dream which, just like the melody, had to end.

Despite this, Avi continued in the same rhythm, which she had chosen for Luna, even if the pianist continuously tried to change the mood. At the end, Avi's feelings for Luna endured, but she had no more desire to play again. There was sweat on her skin, and her heart was pounding, yet she didn't fully understand why.

"A beautiful song." - The pianist praised.

"Thank you, but it's hard to match the way you play." - Avi admitted.

The pianist laughed quietly. - "Yet, you still managed to do it. I'll even admit that you achieved much more..."

"...but?" - Avi asked, unsure about the pianist's intentions.

"...but in the end, everything we played was merely some sounds, which can't move planets, or reignite the stars." - The pianist added.

"They can move many hearts, and many hearts can make stars move again." - Avi denied.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

"Hearts... so fragile. All it takes is one sting, and they stop beating." - The pianist said quietly.

Avi didn't enjoy the way the girl was speaking. She didn't plan to wait any longer. - "Why did you flee to the sky?"

"Flee?" - The pianist asked, flabbergasted. - "I never fled. The sky is mine."

Avi sensed an icy coldness enveloping her whole body. It wasn't natural. Something was amiss. -

"Sorry..." - She stammered. - "...Did you send the letter to me?"

"Indeed, I did." - The pianist admitted as she closed the piano.

"...but you're not..." - Avi whispered.

"The Earthborn?" - The pianist spoke as she got up. From her sleeve, a sharpened plastic tube slid out. -

"No, I'm obviously not." - Other prisoners that accompanied them also revealed similar weapons and began to approach Avi.

"HELP!!" - Avi screamed. She didn't understand why neither the prison lookout nor the cameras worked here anymore.

“Being able to play on a living instrument... I haven't felt this satisfaction in so long.” - The pianist said, her hand raising above Avi, ready to strike. However, it was immediately grabbed by someone else and twisted back, causing it to bend with a painful crunch.

It was the shortest of prisoners, a head's height below Avi. Silver metallic freckles shimmered on the girl's gray-skinned face under the lamp light, while her deep blue eyes looked at Avi with seriousness and calm, as if being completely in control of the situation.

The pianist stared at her former companion with fury. - “Eira!? YOU TRAITOR!”

The other two prisoners attacked Eira, who blocked them with feathers of her black wings. Despite being wounded multiple times and her feathers falling, Eira managed to send a powerful punch to the jaw of the first opponent, causing them to lose consciousness immediately.

The second assailant sensed an opportunity and jabbed at Eira's neck, who still remained confident and calm, and with a kick to the stomach, sent her enemy to the opposite wall.

Now, Eira stared down the pianist. - “I have no mercy for the likes of you, but I'll leave the judgment to the Prison of Aeons. Maybe you've merely lost your way, and it's still not too late for you.”

“Y-you...” - The pianist uttered in pain. - “You'll regret all your decisions. I promise it.”

Eira grabbed the pianist's healthy arm. - “Say it again, and I'll make sure you won't be able to play any music again.”

Upon hearing that threat, fear appeared in the pianist's eyes for the first time.

Eira noticed it and added. - "Now, you'll go to the guards and politely explain what happened here, do you understand?" - She let the girl go, causing her to immediately dart outside.

Avi was glued to the wall and observing everything passively, in fear for her own life. Even after everything calmed down, she was still not moving, at least until Eira approached and examined her.

"An Earthborn. Incredible." - Eira uttered. - "They call you Avi, is it correct?"

"Y-yes." - Avi stuttered.

"We don't have much time. Even if I was able to help you, they will take me to the lower levels for what had happened here." - Eira informed. - "We are protecting you, but you still have to be cautious."

"Protect me?" - Avi asked. - "You're not Daichi, are you?"

"No, I'm not him." - Eira replied.

“...but do you know where I'll find him?” - Avi inquired.

“You are not supposed to find him. He's supposed to find you. Although I'll admit, it would be easier if you helped him.” - Eira stated.

“How am I supposed to do that?” - Avi asked.

“Can you get to the morgue?” - Eira said. - “It'll be enough.”

“I... I don't know. I'll try.” - Avi replied.

“Good. We don't need anything else.” - Eira stated, then looked behind her. The guards were already here. Two beams of golden light struck the girls, causing them both to lose consciousness.

When Avi woke up, she was in solitary confinement, in a straitjacket, and access to her prison panel was disabled. All Avi could see was a clock, which informed that there were two hours and sixteen minutes until she was visited by a 'supervisor', so she waited in the darkness, tied, until a familiar scientist in a labcoat appeared in front of her.

"A-674. What an unpleasant meeting it is." - The scientist said as he entered the cell. - "I see that it's hard for you to adapt."

Avi didn't answer, but instead gazed at him angrily.

"Eh? You're not too talkative, and that wouldn't bode well for your stay here." - The scientist said as he sat on the edge of a nearby bed.

"What do you want!?" - Avi finally screamed out. - "I already know that you hold me here only to quietly get rid of me!"

"Symptoms of paranoia... Hmm, that's not a good sign for the recovery process." - The scientist uttered with a mysterious half-smile.

"You're the ones being paranoid. Otherwise, you wouldn't keep an innocent person here." - Avi countered.

The scientist took out a vape and inhaled vapour. After he peacefully exhaled, he added. - "We've already talked about this. Let's focus on what had happened in the practice room number one hundred and nine."

"They wanted to assassinate me." - Avi said. - "That's what."

"We already know that from the reports of other prisoners." - The scientist revealed. - "I'm more interested in what you think about why they would want to do that."

Avi narrowed her eyes. She didn't feel like trusting her interrogator. - "Shouldn't you already know?"

"You're not the one who is asking questions here." - The scientist replied. - "Just answer."

"I don't know why they wanted to kill me." - Avi replied.

"That would contradict what other prisoners said." - The scientist informed.

Avi decided to stay silent, despite the pressure.

"...so?" - The scientist continued.

"I already told you! I DON'T KNOW!!" - Avi shouted. - "If you believe otherwise, prove it."

"I don't think it would benefit us in any way." - The scientist stated calmly. - "Are you sure you want to stick to your testimony?"

Avi fidgeted nervously. - "I don't know. It could be because you called me a heretic?"

"They would ignore a standard heretic." - The scientist said as he leaned back and exhaled vapour. - "I think it might have something to do with the person you're looking for. What was his name...?"

Avi bit her tongue. She didn't think that what she revealed before she was sentenced would be that important.

"Daichi." - The scientist uttered. - "This was noted down when you were brought in... so, can you tell us, what did you learn so far?"

Avi didn't utter a word.

"Do as you wish..." - The scientist said. - "...but if you prefer to stay silent, we won't be able to guarantee your safety. That man is dangerous and knows how to manipulate people like you."

"Who do you think I am!? I can think for myself!" - Avi protested. - "Neither you, nor Daichi, nor anyone will play tricks on me!"

Another mysterious half-smile appeared on the scientist's face. - "Oh, really?"

"Are you insinuating something!?" - Avi said.

"No..." - The scientist added. - "...but you have to remember that ultimately, we decide how long and where you'll be kept. If we don't like your behavior, we'll send you to the lower levels, just like we did with those involved in the last fight, and I assure you that place isn't as comfortable as your current cell. I'm sure you wouldn't like it, because your ability to contact friends and family would be severely limited. Do you understand?"

Hearing this, Avi became truly afraid.

"Don't do anything stupid, and everyone will be happy." - The scientist added, then stood up. - "Now, I'm sending you back to your cell."