

## Last Star 94

Star XXXIII ~ Cage ~ Part XII

Avi had a lot to think over. She remembered how she had been deceived by the letter, and she also wondered who else might pretend to be her friend, but she quickly stopped these intrusive thoughts. - "No! I can't think like that! If I doubt anyone's goodness, then everything will be without meaning." - She gently patted her cheeks, then looked at her prison interface. - "One more week and I'll have enough money to give Kraken a reputation. I hope I'll be able to bargain for something more."

She then waited until dinner and once again sat next to Goose and Ace, but quickly noticed that Kraken wasn't with them.

Avi asked right away. - "Is Kraken alright?"

"They took her to the hospital wing." - Ace informed. - "Her neural blockers seem to be malfunctioning. Lately, she's getting more and more 'hungry'."

"It never happened in our block." - Goose added. - "Something bad is going to happen. I can feel it in my feathers."

"Will Kraken stay there for long?" - Avi asked.

"Nobody knows. It can take a week, it can take months." - Ace said.

“Eh, why did it have to happen when I had business with her.” - Avi commented.

“You can deal with me directly. Our agreement is still valid.” -Ace added.

Avi felt dislike for Ace, but she didn't complain this time. - “I have to get my reputation earlier. As soon as I make my first payment.”

Ace intertwined her hands. - “What do you offer in exchange?”

“I'll pay you whatever surplus money I get from my new job until I get you your last star.” - Avi suggested.

“Wait... you already have enough reputation?” - Goose asked, shocked.

“Yes. I've got two stars, and I need only one more.” - Avi revealed the info on her prison interface.

Ace gazed at it, quite amazed. - “Well, well. Not bad, but that's not enough. If you plan to work in the laundry, I want double the surplus for a month.”

Avi counted in her mind. - “Hey! That's more than five thousand credits! I was hoping for honest rates!”

"In business, honesty is relative." - Ace added. - "Do you agree, or do you withdraw?"

Although it pained Avi that she would have to tighten her belt even longer, she was desperate and felt that time was running out. She didn't even know if she would still be here, or if she would still be alive to pay the debt to Ace and Kraken.

"I'm in." - Avi agreed.

"In that case, I look forward to receiving the first payment." - Ace said, then continued eating.

Goose was deep in thought and soon spoke. - "Anna. You not only saved Glass-Tooth, but also, despite the adversities, quickly earned the respect of three people. I'm trusting you. If you want to escape, I'll try to help."

Avi, herself, was also silently pondering. She was afraid Ace would eavesdrop, but finally spoke. - "Okay. Do you know how to get to the morgue?"

Goose looked at Avi like she was dumb.

Ace just laughed. - "By dying."

Avi sighed. - "That doesn't help."

"Why do you want to get there?" - Goose inquired.

"It's the first step to my freedom." - Avi replied.

"That's beyond anyone's ability." - Ace said. - "Give up. You won't make it without outside help, and the guards make sure to check everything."

"Luna... maybe she could figure something out?" - Goose asked.

Avi turned to Goose, exclaiming enthusiastically. - "I'm sure she can!! Do you have a plan?"

"I can discreetly tell her what we need, but it can succeed only once." - Goose said. - "Afterwards, your rescuers must find you on their own."

"You really could do that?" - Avi asked, slightly worried. - "You never told us."

"I don't think you understand. Once again, I can't do it twice." - Goose said. - "If I revealed anything, anyone could use it against me."

Ace was doubtful. - "...then why would you waste your chance now?"

“...because I trust Anna.” - Goose said. - “She said she would save my brother. It's my only hope.”

“I'll do it. You have my word.” - Avi assured.

“I don't know when, and if anyone will message me back.” - Goose informed. - “That's why you need to be on alert and pay attention to all the details.”

“You got it!” - Avi exclaimed, then finished her meal and smiled brightly at Goose. - “I'm grateful for what you do for me, Goose. I'll not abuse your trust, you have my word.”

Goose just looked at Avi with a corner of her eye. - “When you're finally given your chance, don't waste any time on goodbyes and seize it as firmly as you can.”

“I'll do just that!” - Avi said. - “Although...” - Her expression became sadder. - “I found someone I care about here, but we parted ways in less-than-favorable circumstances. I would prefer to fix it first.”

The tale has been stolen; if detected on Amazon, report the violation.

“Forget about her.” - Goose replied. - “It's for the best.”

"I made a promise to her." - Avi mentioned.

"What was her name?" - Ace inquired.

"Una... they call her the Lost One." - Avi revealed.

Ace sighed. - "I can deal with your issue. What do you want to tell her?"

Avi pondered for a moment. - "I want to tell her that she's still my friend and that I care about her. I want her to know that I'm grateful for every moment we shared, and if she only wants it, that I'll return to her one day, so we can spread the words of good across the universe."

"Just it?" - Ace asked.

"Yeah. I believe that Una will understand my feelings." - Avi summed up.

"Alright." - Ace confirmed. - "I won't wind her right way, but rest easy, your message will reach her."

Goose was somehow distrustful. - "Out of curiosity – why are you doing this, Ace? You're not gaining anything."

Ace studied Goose thoroughly, making sure that her next words would be well understood. - "I trust Kraken's instincts. If she sensed the smell of rot, I want to make sure it doesn't come from me."

Goose flinched, although it wasn't noticeable. - "Anyway... when you plan your escape, leave the past behind, Anna. Every second counts."

"I think I get what you mean..." - Avi replied. - "...I don't know what's going to happen, so I can't promise anything, but I'll make sure not to look back."

Goose sighed. - "That's all I need." - She tidied up her tray, then got up. - "I'll have to start preparing everything. It's unlikely we'll ever meet again."

Ace didn't bother, but Avi added. - "Thank you for everything, Goose."

"Just always be ready." - Goose requested.

"I will." - Avi assured, waving Goose goodbye one last time.

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Another four days have passed, during which Avi worked for her last reputation star. Ace didn't cause any problems, and Avi knew that she would be able to sign up for laundry work right after the weekend.

During her days of break, Avi also looked for Una in the parks, hoping that she would continue to spread her teachings, but it was to no avail. In the evening, she got another chance to speak to Luna.

Avi entered her cubicle, and the lamp indicated they could speak.

“Avi!” - Luna exclaimed.

Avi felt the stress of the entire week leave her once again. With tears in her eyes, she answered. - “I’m here, Luna.”

“Do you realize how much I’ve missed you?” - Luna spoke. - “Without you, I’m like a moon without stars. To be able to hear your voice, even briefly, is like a cold, morning rain, bringing me back to life, but when I open my eyes, you’re not next to me, even though I can still feel your fragrance in my memories. It hurts.”

“I know...” - Avi assured. - “...but I also know that you’re strong. I would love to tell you everything. To be with you again, enjoying life together. You should know that I’ll keep fighting for it to happen.”

Luna wiped her tears. - “I will, too. Together with Virka, we’ll figure something out. I’m just afraid that by leaving you here, among enemies, they’ll take you from me before we even get a chance.”

“I have friends here, too, Luna.” - Avi reminded. - “When the time of trial comes, we’ll support each other.”



"If you trust them, I'll trust them, too..." - Luna replied. - "...but do know that even if all of the stars were about to fall, I'll find you even if I won't be able to hear your calling."

"Luna..." - Avi uttered. - "I believe it, too, wholeheartedly, and I'll keep calling your name, even if I'm out of breath. We'll get through this together."

"We will." - Luna repeated quietly. - "Are you sleeping well? Do you have any nightmares lately?"

"No." - Avi assured. - "Although I'll admit that I'm not used to getting up early and working continuously."

"Are you still forcing yourself to wallow in the filth for them?" - Luna asked. - "You shouldn't."

"No work is shameful, Luna..." - Avi stated. - "...but no. Tomorrow, I'm starting a new job in the laundry."

Luna exhaled with relief. - "That's good to hear. It'll be safer there."

Avi felt uncomfortable hearing Luna's last words, and Luna noticed the weird pause.

"Avi. Is there anything you didn't tell me?" - Luna asked.

"Eee... uhm... You know..." - Avi stuttered. - "I'm doing fine! Haha!" - She laughed nervously.

"Speak already." - Luna demanded.

"Uhm... there was another incident involving some other prisoners." - Avi uttered.

Luna felt a weight in her throat.

"...but I'm safe and sound!" - Avi tried to calm her down. - "I have many invisible allies who protect me. Really, there's no need to be afraid!"

"Avi..." - Luna uttered, utterly exhausted. - "The mere fact that you are in danger is too much for me. I... I can't bear these thoughts that I don't know what's happening to you, that I don't know what threatens you... that something may happen at any moment."

"Luna. Everything will be alright." - Avi spoke reassuringly.

"How can you know that!?" - Luna lost it. - "No, I won't believe these words, not until you're with me again."

"Please..." - Avi whispered. - "...give us a bit more time. I also want to go back to our little home."

Luna was quiet for a long time. - "Your shell. It's so weak and fragile. I simply want to protect you, but you're not letting me do it."

"I trust you. You'll find a way to save me, without sacrificing anyone." - Avi replied.

Luna's voice cracked. It was sad. - "No. I can't do anything on my own. Nothing at all. Only Virka can still help you."

"That's enough. You don't have to rely solely on yourself." - Avi assured.

"Virka. She didn't sleep for the last two nights. She sat in front of the communicators the entire time." - Luna revealed. - "She's trying so hard, and I'm worried she'll hurt herself in the process."

"Virka...." - Avi muttered. - "...cares that much?"

"Every one of us cares, and if we only could, we would replace her." - Luna stated.

"I... I didn't know." - Avi uttered quietly. - "I'm sorry. Tell her that I'm worried about her, and please, ask her not to sacrifice herself so much."

"It will only have the opposite effect of what's intended." - Luna said. - "I feel that she broke inside, and I can't tell how long she will be able to continue. Even your parents started to argue. Without you, everything began to crumble."

"I didn't know... Luna, you too? That much?" - Avi asked.

"You have no idea." - Luna answered.

Avi lowered her head, her fists clenching her knees. - "I'm sorry. It's my fault."

Luna was silent, and Avi also tightened her lips for a lengthy minute.

"I promise." - Avi finally uttered. - "I'll fix everything soon."

"If you only could give us some sign that you're close." - Luna spoke in a faint voice.

"I will." - Avi added.

"I'll let everyone know..." - Luna said. - "...but please, don't take away their hope. You have to pull it off."

"I'll succeed. Know that once I return, we'll make up for every lost second." - Avi promised.

"You returning is enough." - Luna uttered quietly.

Although both girls gave themselves a moment to calm their emotions down, it had the opposite effect.

Luna was the first to break down in tears and speak. - "They gave us so little time... and I want to tell you so much."

Sensing Luna's sadness, tears also rolled down Avi's cheeks. - "I know. You don't need to say anything."

"I love you, Avi." - Luna uttered. - "Don't leave me alone, please."

"My soul is always with you." - Avi spoke in a gentle voice. - "Remember this, no matter the circumstances."

The lamp above them flickered, signaling that the conversation was about to end.

"I love you, too, Luna." - Avi added, right before the phone device was locked.