

Starlive

Book Three

Fire That Heals

Sweat-Dirt-Rage

The mission was simple.

Land. Survey. Extract rare mineral.

Avoid the primitive species known as the Lobbels, a race that evolved without frontal lobes.

*They run on nothing but instinct. Violence. Lust. Fear. Kind of like
your relationship, honestly.*

Leo

Shut it.

Star

That's fair.

Olive

Then the planet fought back.

Literally.

The atmosphere was laced with neuro spores, a natural defense system that disables empathy and boosts raw aggression.

And within minutes... they were infected.

They didn't notice at first.

Just... glances that lingered too long.

Breath too fast.

Voices a little sharper than necessary.

Don't tell me how to hold a weapon. I taught you how to aim.

Star

No, you taught me how to miss on purpose so you could feel in control.

Olive

Fuck you.

Star

You wish.

Olive

It escalated fast.

A punch thrown during recon.

A shove near the campfire.

Snarled accusations between sips of protein sludge.

Then it wasn't about the mission anymore.

It was about everything else.

You only want me when I'm bleeding!

Olive

And you only love me when I'm worshipping you like a broken toy!

Star

They fought.

Not with powers.

With fists.

With teeth.
With all the years of not saying the ugly things.
Sweat. Dirt. Rage. Bruises.
And underneath it all, love trying to scream through the blood.
They collapsed into the dirt.
Chest to chest.
Nose to nose.
And didn't kiss.
Didn't cry.
Didn't speak.
They just laid there. Breathing hard. Trembling.
More distance between them now than light-years could measure.
The spores faded.
The Lobbels left them alone.

Extraction complete. Ready to bounce?

Leo

pinged

Neither of them replied.
Star sits alone on the ship ramp. Wiping blood from her knuckles.
Olive stands inside. Staring at his hands like he just realized what they were capable of.
They don't speak.
They don't look.
They don't touch.

Mind You

They were still sore.

Still not speaking.

Still orbiting each other like unstable moons.

Leo took them to a planet called Psy, known for psychic rehabilitation and deep neural mapping.

It's supposed to help resolve internal conflicts. Which, considering last chapter, you've got plenty of.

Leo

You think this is funny?

Star

No. But the writer does

Leo

They were promised clarity.

Instead, they were plugged into a mind-machine called the Despejo.

The machine doesn't read thoughts.

It externalizes the war inside you.

And then... it makes you fight it.

Star and Olive woke in two separate dreamscapes.

But what waited for them wasn't alien.

It was themselves.

Olive's Mind

He stood in a cathedral made of grief.
Broken altars. Empty pews. Mirrors instead of windows.
And at the front?
Himself.
But... twisted.

*You're pathetic. You think devotion makes you worthy? It just makes
you disposable.*

Meta Olive
said

He fought.
But his shadow fought harder.
Every strike landed like a whispered memory

She'll leave.
Meta Olive

You're too soft.
Meta Olive

You only feel loved when you're in pain.
Meta Olive

Star's Mind

A battlefield. Endless. Gray.
Every soldier?
Her.
Thousands of Stars.
All expressions of rage. Coldness. Violence. Pride. Abandonment.
They stared her down.

You don't know who you are without anger.

All Star Metas

You made yourself untouchable because it's easier than being held.

All Star Metas

You'll burn him. Like you burned everyone else.

All Star Metas

She charged.

She screamed.

She cried.

She bled.

And still they stood.

Back in the real world, Olive and Star were convulsing in the pods.

Leo hovered nearby, holding a bucket of emergency chocolate and whispering

You guys suck at healing, but you look amazing doing it.

Leo

They returned hours later.

Exhausted.

Shell-shocked.

Still not speaking.

They passed each other in the corridor.

Paused.

Just long enough to want to reach out.

Then kept walking.

The hallway between their quarters.

Both of them sitting on opposite sides of the same wall.

Neither speaking.

Both holding the exact same thought

They saw the worst of me. And they didn't stay.

No apology.

No hug.

No sex.

Just silence.

And heartbreak.

A Line

The mission: diplomatic liaison on Habibi-9, a planet where humor is currency and insults are an art form.

*They communicate through roasting. It's like therapy meets gladiator
battle meets a really toxic group chat.*

Leo

Great. My childhood prepared me for this.

Star

Fantastic. Maybe I'll finally get praised for crying attractively.

Olive

The moment they stepped off the ship, a local heckled them

Wow! A woman and her emotional support simp! Bold.

Local

The crowd howled.
The words hit like a physical slap.
Because here?
Insults have mass.

Sarcasm has kinetic force.
Passive-aggression? Lethal.
They were enrolled in the Trial of Wits, a mandatory public sparring match.
The rules?
Weaponize your resentment. Make them laugh, or make them bleed.
First round, **Olive**.
He stepped into the circle.
Stared at Star.
She stared back.
And for the first time since their last fight, they spoke.
Through jokes.

*She's like a gravity well—beautiful, powerful, and no one escapes
without emotional damage.*

Olive

The crowd laughed.

*He's like a poem written by a sad librarian, haunting, horny, and too
long.*

Star

Louder laughter.

You only love me when I'm silent.

Olive

You only hear me when I'm screaming.

Star

The laughter softened.
The words started to hit.

*You made me feel safe once. That was the most dangerous thing you
ever did.*

Star

*You made me feel needed. And now I can't breathe without wondering if
I still am.*

Olive

Silence.

Too real! POINTS TO BOTH. NOW FIGHT.

Host

declared

It escalated.
Not physically.
But emotionally.
The crowd vanished.
The stage faded.
It was just them.
Cutting each other with clever words and years of unresolved bullshit.

You turned me into someone I'm scared to be when you're not around.

Olive

You only see me when I'm hurting. You don't love me, you recognize me.

Star

You made me afraid to heal, because I thought I'd lose you.

Olive

And then Star said it.
Not with venom.
Just exhaustion.

I don't know if I even like who we are anymore.

Star

The laughter stopped.
The crowd bowed.
The duel was over.
They had won.
But they felt like they lost everything.
Back on the ship.
They didn't speak.
Didn't fight.
Didn't kiss.
They just... sat. In different rooms. Counting everything they hadn't said.
Leo, watching their silence through the monitor.

Gods help you both. You still love each other. And that's the worst part.

Leo

whispered

No resolution. No kiss.
Only the quiet aftermath of saying too much.
And not enough.

The Switch

They arrive at a station known only as Ouroboros.
No inhabitants. Just whispers.
A place said to be built by a species that no longer exists because they erased themselves to stop the pain.
At its center: the Switch.
A machine.
A gift. Or a weapon.
It allows two connected minds to delete a single core memory in the other.
The price?
Everything that grew from that memory, gone.
Trust. Empathy. Closeness. Love.

Sounds sketchy. Smells like forgotten trauma.

Leo

So... I could erase the time he left me alone in that cave.

Star

And I could erase the first time she told me she wished we'd never met.

Olive

They stare at the machine.
Then at each other.
Then away.

*You may proceed. Only one of you must press the switch. You will not
remember what was lost. But you will know you're no longer angry.
And you will wonder why it feels so quiet.*

AI

They sit across from each other.
A memory between them

That fight.
The bad one.
The one that changed everything.
The one where she said,
I don't need you. I never did.
The one where he walked out.
And *didn't come back for three days.*

If I press it... I'll stop remembering the part of you that scared me.

Star

And if I press it... I'll stop remembering the part of me that forgave you.

Olive

They sit in silence.
Tears well up.

What if we're better without it?

Star

What if we're just strangers without it?

Star

They almost do it.
Fingers hover over the button.
One breath.
Two.
But neither presses.
Not out of strength.
Out of fear.
They walk away.
Not because they chose to heal.
Because they couldn't choose each other.
Not this time.
Back on the ship, they sit far apart.
A tension worse than before.
They didn't forgive.
They just... let it rot.
The Switch sits untouched.
It pulses softly.
Waiting.
They're not speaking.
Not healing.
Not even fighting now.
Just... unraveling.
Bit by bit.
And love?
Love is a bruise they stopped touching.

Leo

The ship was too quiet.
Star had stopped fixing things just to stay busy.
Olive had stopped pretending he wasn't listening for her footsteps.
They passed each other like ghosts now.
No war.
No peace.
Just distance.
And Leo watched it all.
He wasn't just their tech.
He wasn't just their AI.
He was their friend.
Their witness.
Their shadow.
He'd seen their first kiss, their last apology, the look in their eyes when they almost
meant goodbye.
And now... he couldn't stay silent anymore.
He called a lockdown.

*Sorry. Ship's not moving. Airlocks sealed. Oxygen limited. You're stuck
here. With me.*

Leo

What the fuck, Leo?

Star

We're not in the mood.

Olive

Good. Because I am. Sit your dysfunctional asses down. We're gonna talk.

Leo

He projected their memories in the common room.
Every brutal fight.
Every raw confession.
Every whispered I love you they thought no one heard.

You think you're broken? You think this is failure? You think aggression means you're not meant for each other? You're wrong.

Leo

The screen showed

Star covering Olive with her body during a firefight.
Olive dragging her from a collapsing asteroid while sobbing.
Both of them staring at each other like they didn't know if the next word would be marriage or murder.

Love isn't supposed to be clean. Or soft. Or easy.

Leo

You chose each other. Over and over. Even when it sucked.

Leo

They tried to leave.
He locked the doors tighter.

You don't get to break like this. Not after all that.

Leo

*You wanna destroy it? Fine. But own it. Say it. Say you don't love
each other anymore.*

Leo

Silence.

Star's jaw clenched.

Olive looked away.

But neither spoke.

That's what I thought.

Leo

softly

He played the last recording.

Them. In the dark. Half-asleep.

Do you think we'll make it?

Star

No. But I'll fight for you anyway.

Olive

Even when I don't make it easy?

Star

You bet
Olive

The silence after was total.
Leo let it sit.
Then opened the doors.

You're free to go.
Leo

Just... don't forget who you were when you still believed in each other.
Leo

He left.
Alone.
Star and Olive sit in the dark.
Not touching.
But closer.
Not healed.
But... hurting in the same direction.
The fuse has been lit again.
Not for a reconciliation.
Not yet.
But for the fight to get there.

Wild

A wormhole malfunction, *or maybe Leo's subtle sabotage*, he's not telling.
They crash on a Class-0 planet.
No tech.
No weapons.
No ship.
No Leo.
Just woods. Heat. Hunger.
And each other.

We should find shelter.
Olive

I'm not your project.
Star

And I'm not your punching bag.
Olive

Silence.
Then thunder.
They move.
Together.
But not close.
Not yet.

Day 1

They build a shelter.

Separate corners.

Separate fires.

No talking.

.

.

.

Day 3

Star hunts.

Olive cooks.

They argue about meat ratios.

Then stop arguing.

Then stop eating.

.

.

.

Day 5

A predator attacks.

Instinct kicks in.

They fight back together.

Like a dance.

Sharp. Efficient. Perfect.

Then...

They look at each other like they remember.

Then turn away.

.

.

.

Day 7

It rains.

Their shelter collapses.

Star yells.

Olive snaps.

It begins.

You always think you know better like love makes you a fucking messiah.

Star

And you think being broken makes you goddamn holy!

Olive

I'm angry because I need you and I hate that!

Star

*I'm angry because you made me believe that needing someone meant I
was enough!*

Olive

They scream.

They cry.

They shove.

They shake.

They fall apart.

Again.

But there's no ship to run to.

No Leo to buffer.

Just the wild.

Night falls.

The fire dies.

They lie beside each other, not cuddling, not talking, just close enough to feel breath
on the other's skin.

Like the proximity hurts more than the arguments.

Like they still don't know if the wildest thing is staying.

I hate that I still want to fight for us.

Star

whispered

Olive doesn't respond.
But he pulls her closer in his sleep.
And for one hour...
They dream the same dream:

Peace.

Still no reconciliation.
Still no apologies.
But something animal, raw, aching, real, is cracking open.

Let Go

They're rescued.

Not by Leo.

By a species called the Semites, fluid beings, unarmed and serene. A culture where dominance is taboo and submission is sacred.

To enter their city, one must kneel.

To speak, one must first listen.

To lead, one must first ask for help.

This is a cult.

Star

This is therapy.

Olive

That's worse.

Star

The Semites pair them with *Guides*, not teachers, not jailers.

But... mirrors. Calm, gentle figures who only ask questions like scalpels

What do you gain from being feared?

What are you protecting with control?

When did you decide surrender meant weakness?

Star can't sit still.
She hates the quiet.
She snaps at everyone. Laughs too loud. Refuses to make eye contact.

If you scream in every room, you don't have to hear yourself think.

Star's Guide

She doesn't come to the next session.
Olive, meanwhile, tries to do everything right.
He nods. Apologizes. Bows. Listens.

*If you give everything, there's nothing left to receive. Do you even want
love or just to avoid abandonment?*

Olive's Guide

He doesn't cry.
But he doesn't sleep that night.
They're brought together for the final rite *Mutual surrender*.
They must sit across from one another.
Unarmed.
Undistracted.
And say what they've never dared.
Not in anger.
But in humility.
Neither speaks.

*You scare me. Not because you're cruel. But because you see me. And
I'm not ready to be that honest.*

Olive

I want to be held... but I don't know how to not fight the arms trying.

Star

said after a long silence

The ritual asks for one final thing *touch*.
Not sexual.
Not romantic.
Just a hand on a hand.
They hesitate.
Then do it.
Their fingers meet.
Not with hunger.
But with mercy.
They don't reconcile.
They don't kiss.
But they breathe again.
And for a second, it doesn't hurt.
As they leave the Semite temple, Star glances at Olive.

If I ever say I don't need you...
Star

You'll be lying
Olive

They don't smile.
But something softens.
Still not healed.
Still not back together.
But ready for the final blow...

Broken

No alarms.

No threats.

No supernovas collapsing.

Just a docking station on a floating archive moon.

They're supposed to be gathering information.

But really, they're here to fall apart.

They haven't touched in three weeks. They haven't slept in the same room in two.

Their clothes are clean, but their eyes are tired.

Leo hasn't spoken to either of them in days.

Even he knows this is sacred.

You said once you'd fight for me.

Star

I did.

Olive

Then why does it feel like you gave up?

Star

*Because I stopped fighting against you. And I think... you wanted that
more than love.*

Olive

The archive moon holds every message ever lost in time.
Every unsent letter.
Every *I love you* never said.
Every goodbye that never made it out the throat.
Star finds one from herself. Written years ago.
To no one.
To him.

*I want to believe we're worth it. But I don't know who I am when I'm
not mad.*
Star

She deletes it.
Olive reads a message from another version of himself. A soft one. A happier one.

*I stayed. Even when she didn't know how to love. Because I did. And
that was enough.*
Olive

He puts it back.
They meet on the edge of the moon.
No weapons.
No masks.
No more questions.
Just two people who once swore they'd never give up... And now finally might.

I'm tired of hurting you.
Star

And I'm tired of making you the villain when you're just... hurt.
Olive

Und was nun?

Star

Igual y nos damos tantito espacio pa' dejar de sangrar.

Olive

Igual y nos decimos adiós.

Star

Kann sein.

Olive

They don't cry.

Not in front of each other.

They just walk away.

Different ships.

Different vectors.

Different stars.

Leo stands alone at the center console. Watching two trajectories move apart.

Not forever. But far enough.

They'll come back. They always do.

Leo

muttered

No reunion.

No kiss.

No promise.

Just space.

And silence.

The Beast

They've been apart for weeks.
Different systems.
Different missions.
Each pretending they're doing better.
Each lying to Leo, who's grown passive-aggressively poetic.

Your vitals suggest you miss her.

Your navigation patterns suggest you're lost.

Also, you're listening to the same sad playlist on repeat and it's embarrassing.

Then the signal hits.
A distress beacon, from The Rift Below All Things.
A rupture in space-time where nothing returns.
Where gods send their nightmares to die.
And something has awakened there.
A creature made from everything they buried.
Leo brings them both.
Separately.
No warning.
No time.
They land on opposite sides of the abyss.
The air is thick with memory.
The sky smells like heartbreak.
And in the center, The Beast.
It has no name. Only shape: Star's old rage. Olive's old guilt.
Their love, twisted by fear, calcified by silence.
It doesn't roar.
It reminds.

*You said you'd never leave. You said I was enough. You made me a
mirror, and then hated what you saw.*

The Beast

They try to fight it.
Separately.
Blasts. Blades. Power.
But it absorbs everything.
Because the Beast is them.
Everything they couldn't say.
Everything they did.
Everything they didn't do.
Leo appears in a projection.
Not snarky. Not smug.
Just... sad.

You're not going to kill this thing apart.

Leo

You have to remember why you ever held hands in the fire.

Leo

They look at each other across the battlefield.
The silence stretches.
Then Olive speaks.
Not loud.
Not dramatic.
Just... true.

*I love you. 'Cuz you are a mess. 'Cuz your rage. But mainly, because
you stayed... even when it hurt*

Olive

Star walks toward him. Shaking.
Eyes wet.
Voice raw.

*I love you too. Even when you disappear inside yourself. Even when I
don't know how to ask you to stay.*

Star

They touch.
And the Beast... screams.
Collapses.
Because it's not made to withstand truth.
It dissolves into stardust and shame.
And they don't cheer.
They just hold each other.
Back on the ship.
Olive wraps a bandage around Star's arm.
Star brushes hair from his face.
Leo plays soft music.

Are we ok?

Olive

No... but we will be.

Star

They kiss.
Not like lovers.
Not like warriors.
But like home.