

## Short 44 - We're Still Here

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## Short 44 - We're Still Here

by [stgjr](#)

### Summary

Our narrator takes Pearl, Steven, Connie, and his Companions to visit a particular wonder, one that he has not seen since losing Katherine.

### Notes

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Okay, so I got a little carried away. But who wouldn't?

I mean, two young and very sweet children who simply fell in love with the sights of alien worlds, and one poor soul getting a chance to see the things she never thought she'd see again. How could I resist the temptation to take Steven, Connie, and Pearl on a few stops? It's not like they'd be missed. I mean, hello, time traveler here!

Well, alright, if not for Liara I might have gotten carried away. But that's what she's there for. To keep me grounded.

So we were on what was to be the final little stop. Just a chance to show them something special. Namely, the Kraknaradaaplikuiuspinocka Nebula. Visible from Kraknardaaplikuiuspinralakoolis.

Now try to say that five times fast.

The earthy browns, reds, yellows, and greens filled the night sky, while below we had a nice open plain to relax upon while looking up at the sight. I'd brought out the lounge chairs and picnic blankets for the occasion. "Now..." I checked my watch. "In about five minutes, maybe ten, the plasma currents in the nebula will intersect. It should cause the most spectacular light display."

Steven and Connie were most interested in that, and they quickly found a place to sit, talk, and watch.

"You've never mentioned this one before," Liara remarked from where she was sitting.

"Oh, well, you know how it is. So many sights, can't mention them all." I smiled at her. And the smile was as hollow as my excuse, which hadn't fooled Liara. She nodded at me and found somewhere to lay out a blanket. Katara said closer to the children. The bond there was growing quite well.

I was alone for the moment. But only the moment. Pearl took a seat beside me and looked up. "This is what it's like for you all of the time, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, yes it is," I confirmed. "You'd think one universe is enough to experience, but to have so many..." An excited grin came to me. "Oh, it's quite exhilarating. I could travel forever and still not see everything."

For all that she was still smiling, I could see there was now sadness in Pearl's expression. Her eyes grew distant. "I miss it."

"I can understand that." I sat up. "If you don't mind me asking, why did you stop?"

Pearl's eyes focused a little. I watched her think on an answer, which she eventually gave. "I made a choice," she answered. "I made a choice to take a stand."

"Ah? For what? Or, perhaps, the question should be... for *whom*?"

Pearl's eyes went over to where Steven and Connie were sharing their thoughts on what I'd shown them so far. Ah. "I did it for her," Pearl admitted.

"Steven's mother?", I surmised.

Pearl nodded. "I gave her everything. I swore to stand and fight for what she believed in, no matter what came."

I saw the tear forming in her eye and nodded. "I see." At that moment, I realized what had happened. It explained Steven's powers. The gem on his belly. "And now she's gone."

Pearl nodded. "And I'm still here."

Stop and imagine. Imagine what it would have been like for beings as old as these Gems, used to traveling about the cosmos, and then being banished to a backwater primitive planet over a moral choice. Doing so all in the name of someone you felt deeply for. And then, suddenly, that person was gone.

Imagine the pain that would cause. Imagine the sheer sense of loss. Everything given up for someone who was no longer with you. Your entire life - thousands of years - given away, and for what would seem like nothing.

"That would explain your devotion to Steven rather well," I remarked.

I was answered with a nod. "I'll defend him until the end."

Not surprising. It was all Pearl had left, after all.

There was thoughtful silence. I know that I took on an expression that was more mournful than anything. I couldn't help it. Not when considering where I was. And who had been with me the last time I stood on these plains.

I murmured a name without expecting to. And given advanced senses, it shouldn't have surprised me that Pearl heard me. She looked at me with tear-spotted eyes. "Who is Katherine?"

I jolted with initial surprise. I caught myself quickly though. "The necklace was her's," I answered simply.

An understanding look came to Pearl's face. "Oh."

An old and familiar ache filled me. It was best to explain. To get it out. "She was my Companion for quite a while." I smiled fondly at old memories, regardless of the tears coming to my eyes. "I'd met her as a child and watched her grow into a mature young woman. She was brilliant, charming, and devoted to doing the right thing. Her only ambition

was to travel with me and see the wonders of all of the cosmoses." I swallowed as those tears begin to fall. "Now she's gone."

A shadow fell over us. We looked up in time for Katara to kneel on the other picnic blanket. "You've never talked about her before," Katara said to me.

"I suppose not," I answered. "Knowing your loss, I thought it best to not dwell on more loss."

Katara nodded. I saw tears forming in her eyes as she looked to Pearl. "I guess we've all lost people we cared about."

"Yes." Liara stepped up and joined us. I saw tears in her eyes and drew in a breath. Sometimes I forgot what had happened to Matriarch Benezia. How she had died right in front of Liara while trying to resist the indoctrination that the Reaper Sovereign had laid upon her.

Every one of us had gone through loss of some sort, and that loss had shaped us in one way or another. That's what loss does the people. You have a hole in your heart (or hearts, in my case... I suppose it'd be something else for Pearl as well) and that hole changes you. It can even destroy you.

But only if you let it.

"We're still here," I said, blinking away the tears in my eyes. "I've learned it's best to make that worthwhile."

"You're right about that," Pearl agreed. She looked toward Steven and Connie and smiled at them. "For them, if anything. I'm still here for them."

I looked to Katara, who was also looking at the children now. There was a thoughtful look on her face, mixed with obvious pain.

The sky lit up. We all looked skyward and watched as currents of blue and green and orange light streaked through the nebula, strobing brilliantly against the tones of the nebula's gases. "Well, there she goes," I said. I checked my watch. "Right on time."

"It's wonderful." Pearl looked at the sight with delight showing in her teary eyes. The children started to laugh and cheer and dance around in celebration of the lovely sight.

"I don't think this could ever get old," Liara said, smiling. "Katherine must have loved it."

"Oh, she did," I said, a smile crossing my face from the memory of the night I'd showed her this sight. "She did indeed."

The image of us all watching the beautiful sight of the nebula's plasma currents intersecting is a good one to go out on. We'd had our moment of connecting, understanding one another's pain, that sort of thing. Best to go on a bright note.

But then I'd miss the fun part.

As the light show continued, the laughter of Steven and Connie reached a crescendo of joy. We were all looking skyward, so all we saw was a sudden pink flash coming from the bottom of our vision. When I lowered my head, I was treated to a most interesting sight.

Steven and Connie were gone. In their place was someone who looked like a young human woman, age anything from being a large fifteen year old to a twenty year old, wearing midriff-revealing clothes that were quite evidently the shirts the children had been wearing, Steven's pink shirt with the yellow star over Connie's teal blouse. The same with the overlapping blue skirt and high-cut jeans, once pants but now shorts. The shape of the body seemed more on the female side while the face clearly had some androgynous elements to it, and familiar ones too. Add in the long, bushy dark hair and the brown skin tone being between Steven's Caucasian tone and Connie's deep brown complexion, and it was plenty obvious what happened.

Katara and Liara were gawking in utter surprise. Pearl gave a bemused laugh and wiped a tear from her eye. "You two fused on accident again?", she asked cheerfully.

"Um... oops?", answered Stevonnie.

Yes, Stevonnie. I didn't pick the name, mind you. But I suppose that's what you'd call a merger of two people into one coherent entity?

"Ha!", I exclaimed. "Quantum state merger with physical integration. That's *truly* something you don't see every day." I waved a hand. "Don't mind us. Enjoy the show! Come on, everyone, the plasma intersections have another ten minutes to go, and when the main currents intersect it's going to get really good..."

There. Now that's a good note to go out on.

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