

"Aggie came to me and told me to not leave you alone," Leeza said solemnly. "I liked her," she added.

Gregory brushed back a tear. "Well, we have to do what she says," he said, standing back up. "I'll let everyone know that you're taking leave with me. Even the morale officer needs some time off," he said with a wane smile.

Moving to his desk, he sent a note to the Hammons, as well as Michael that Leeza was taking leave with him and they were going to Bajor.

"We better get your things," he said as he put the bag over his shoulder.

"I is all packed up and ready Captain 'Eggery," she said proudly.

She put her hand in his and pulled him towards the turbolift.

(USS Illuminar - Deck 9 - USS Hillary Airlock – 2/O&CMDR Dieter Gregory, 3/O&CMO Dr. Quinna Solice, SFI Lt. Michael Weston and Morale Officer Leeza Pel - 1815)

Gregory entered his authorization codes. The security officer nodded and waved the two of them through.

Leeza ran into the shuttle and put her small bag down on one of the bunks in the back. Gregory stowed his bag on the bunk across from Leeza and headed to the flight deck. Sitting in the pilot's seat, he pulled out the startup checklist and scanned it. "Since you're here Leeza, I might as well put you to work," Gregory said as he handed her the checklist. "I want you to read each step for me and when I tell you, put a check mark next to the step to indicate it's complete."

"What's all this," she asked, turning the PADD upside down and sideways, "Mikey didn't have to do any of this."

"Well," Gregory said, "Michael had a pilot with him, I don't so I need to go by the book. It wouldn't look good if I damaged the ship now, would it?"

"Ohhh, yea, Cap'n 'ekal might not let you have chocolate cake," she said seriously.

"Probably worse than that," he said. "What's step 1?"

Leeza turned the PADD right side up, "ower up the 'puter," she read off the device.

It was slow going, but it was a focused task, which is just what Gregory's mind needed.

There was a chime as his com badge beeped.

=^= Permission to come aboard ^= came Weston's voice.

Leeza was beaming, but Gregory shook his head no. "Denied," he replied.

"Well, it's a bit late for that," came the voice from behind them. Turning around, Gregory saw Michael standing there. Leeza jumped out of her seat and bounced into his arms. "You got my 'essage?" she said eagerly.

"I did, no thanks to Eggery," he said with mock anger. "You think you get to go on leave that easy? Without your friends?"

Gregory replied, "I had hoped to."

“Or me. What is going on here?” Quinna said. She stifled a yawn. She had not had any rest since Zertos 3.

“Well if Michael gets to go and Leeza is going, why can’t I come?” Quinna pulled out 3 year old logic.

Quinna looked sternly at the little girl.

"I guess if I have to." Leeza said.

"Besides, every pirate captain needs his first mate," he said with a smile.

[illegible]

Stardate: 2446.06.13

Dieter sat in the pilot's seat. Even though the ship was on autopilot, he stayed here. He liked the solitude. Leeza was curled up in the chair next to him, playing on the PADD, trying to solve the latest problem that Michael had set for her. For Pex actually.

Michael slid into the currently vacant copilot. Leeza, as was her way, generally occupied it, but she had taken a break to antagonize Quinna for a while. Dieter had been unusually quiet so Michael decided to give him a little time to his thoughts. It had been a rough year for the pair of them, and it had been nice to see his friend settle down into a positive relationship with Aggie. Her death was a... well... a kick to the groin.

He also knew that something was going on with Dieter. Michael's instincts all screamed that whatever it was wasn't good.

Finally he turned and broke the silence. "You know I'm here to talk if you want?"

Gregory turned to face Michael, "I know, Michael, I just am not sure I know what I want to say. Things are a jumble and my world is shattered."

Michael nodded and fell back into silence as he began to run his computer search for his possible contacts at DS 9. Of course, considering his own place in the universe they'd just as likely try to kill him. He didn't look up when he spoke next.

"Nothing's been the same since the Rhyne, has it?" he asked. "Your near death experience changed you. You've never really talked about it."

"Not much to say," Gregory replied, "I don't remember that much of it. For me I went from the Rhyne to the Illuminar and missed the whole transition. Then got busy again, acting as first officer and trying to pretend things were the same. Never felt like I fit in back on the Illuminar."

Michael let that settle for a moment as he fidgeted with the ship's programming. Finally he broke the pause.

"I'd hoped that changed when you found Aggie," Michael said. "She seemed to... center you." He stopped what he was doing and put his hands on the panel, almost holding on to it for support. Without looking up he said, "I *am* sorry Dieter."

"So am I," Dieter replied. "Which is why I needed to leave. See about finding my way back, starting at the place my journey aboard the Illuminar began."

Quinna walked back onto the flight deck and stood between the seats, "What do you hope to accomplish by going back there?" Quinna started. "Your answers are not at the station. You need to go back before that. The way to the future is through the past."

Gregory turned to see Quinna. As she spoke, however, all he saw was Aggie, highlighted with a glow. "I am called, Aggie," he said softly.

Leeza looked at Dieter quizzically, "Captain Eggery, are you cracked? She," Leeza said, sneering at Quinna, "is not Dr. Aggie."

Shaking his head, he saw Quinna, "Well, Doctor, I guess we will see. Perhaps the Kai will let me peer into the Orb of Time."

Michael harrumphed at the mention of the orb. He had been part of an experience, a shared dream, it seemed like a lifetime ago. But it all still sounded like religious hocus pocus to him. However, he didn't want to start that argument with Quinna, again, so he held his tongue.

"All I mean is that this may even go deeper like before joining Starfleet." Quinna explained.

Gregory shrugged, "Maybe. Perhaps our physicists could better answer the question about that than a simple engineer. This feels right."

Michael was suddenly starting to feel the proverbial third wheel. His presence was not required and he thought it best to remove Leeza from the discussion.

"All right Munchkin," he said getting out of the copilot's seat, "it's nearly lunchtime. So you know what that means?"

Quinna smiled at Michael and she took the seat next to Dieter. “We are with you so you know you do not have to do this alone.”

"I think you are wrong." Quinna said. "You go the way you want." Quinna stated without explanation. "You were not planning on coming back, were you?"

“And sometimes it takes a different perspective.” Quinna turned in her seat where she was facing Dieter directly. She took his hand, “And sometimes, all parts of you have to be with you as well. There is a part of you in all of us.”

“Now?” came Michael’s gut check reaction. ~Of course now, idiot.~ He chastised himself knowing Quinna was pretty sure about these medical things. “What do you need, baby?”

"I need... Oh.... Ouch..." Quinna balled her hands in fists. "It's too early. The baby is not ready." Quinna started breathing heavily, "Med kit" Quinna knew that she could stop the labor

Leeza was already out of his lap. He reached over for the medkit and handed it to her.

Quinna scanned herself. "The baby is in trouble. I need to lay down." Quinna slid off her chair and layed down. She put her legs up in the chair. Taking a hypospray she moved to administer it to her baby bump. Quinna reached for Michael.

Michael had already begun to clear a space and lay out some blankets on the floor. She was probably going to need something more solid than those chairs pretty soon. When she grabbed his arm her fingers sunk into the flesh and she squeezed. His own face winced in pain but he stayed silent until she relaxed her grip.

"We are in trouble." Quinna managed to get out between contractions. The intensity of the contractions seemed to slow for the time being. Quinna took deep breaths. "Baby's heart rate is fluctuating. My Blood pressure is high." Tears started running down her eyes.

"It's going to be fine, Quinna," Michael tries to reassure her, his voice filled with more confidence than he actually felt. "I'm here. Tell me what you need."

"I may pass out. The only way to lower my blood pressure is to deliver. This time you must listen to me. The baby is more important." Quinna said as she calmed herself. "Promise me, you will save the baby."

Michael shook his head, "I can't make that promise, Quinna, and you know it. I'll do what I can."

"I am ok right now. Why don't you go and tell Dieter what is going on." Quinna suggested. Quinna needed time to think. She needed to keep her head about herself as she needed to prepare for the worse.

Michael nodded and headed to the cockpit area. He put his hand on Dieter's shoulder. "As if we needed things to get any more interesting, Quinna just went into labor."

"Its too soon, isn't it?" Dieter said. "I can see about getting us to DS9 quicker."

"Somehow I don't think that's gonna be soon enough," Michael told him. "Besides, I may need you back there with me. Unless you want to leave Leeza at the conn."

Gregory smiled, "Leeza, think you can conn the shuttle?"

After a couple of minutes, Leeza came to Quinna's side. She had been listening to Michael as he talked to Dieter. She crawled next to Quinna. "Will the baby be ok?" Leeza's tone was not what she usually took with Quinna. This was more of an apologetic sad tone.

"I hope so," Quinna said.

"I am sorry I am mean to you. I do not want anything bad to happen." Leeza said.

Quinna took a deep breath. "This is not your fault. Wished that you were not always angry with me. We both like Mikey."

Leeza leaned in and gave Quinna a hug, "I promise to be a good girl if you two are ok."

Quinna put an arm on Leeza, "I am going to do everything possible." Quinn lifted Leeza's chin with her finger and looked into her eyes. She was about to say something but she was overwhelmed by dizziness and then need to close her eyes. "Just be happy." Quinn then closed her eyes.

Leeza ran back to the flight deck. A tear ran down her eyes, "She is sleeping."

Gregory looked at Leeza, "Sleeping?" he asked as he stood up and headed to the back of the shuttle. He saw Quinn sleeping and felt Leeza hiding behind his leg. "Michael," he called as he picked up a tricorder.

He looked at the scan, frowned, and showed the results to Michael. Michael took the tricorder and looked at it in disbelief. It was showing no life signs. For the first time in his life Michael Weston was stunned into inaction. How could this be? She can't be... . He couldn't even bring himself to think of the word. Suddenly, as if released from a stasis field he lept into action. He was not doctor, but he'd been in the field enough to have a basic working knowledge of field medicine. He grabbed the med bag and began to root through it looking for the right ampule for the hypo spray.

There was a flash of light and two figures appeared on either side of Quinn they knelt down. One of the figures took Quinn's right hand. "Do not worry little one," one of the figures said, looking at Leeza. "The child will be fine. The journey has just begun."

Quinna looked at the others as they appeared to be stopped in some kind of tableau.

"The emissary will be here soon," the other said before they all disappeared.

Leeza's eyes opened wide and she went back to the flight deck. There, she sat in the pilot's chair, barely reaching the controls. With determination, she entered new coordinates, and increased the engine's power.

In the back of the Hillary, Gregory noted the change in the sounds of the engines. Looking at Quinn and Michael, he sprinted to the flight deck to find Leeza sitting there quietly on her PADD.

=^= USS Hillary, this is Deep Space 9, you have broken out of the docking stack, is everything ok up there Commander? ^=

Sitting in the co-pilot's seat, he looked at the coordinates. They were heading straight for the wormhole.

"DS9, this is Hillary. Sorry about that, a residual course correction that accidentally got entered. Please provide new course."

=^= Hillary, DS9, sending to you now. You're going to miss that springwine there, Dieter. ^=

"Hillary copies."

As Gregory went to adjust the course, Leeza put her little hand on his. "This is the way," she said in a very grown up manner.

Suddenly Aggie appeared, placing a glowing, ghostly hand on top of Dieter and Leeza's. "Trust me darling," she said before moving to the back of the shuttle again.

Gregory looked out the viewscreen and saw the wormhole event horizon begin to open.

(Reply None)
(Posted by Al, Kris and Tim)

[illegible]

The Hillary entered the wormhole, passing though the event horizon. For all his time on DS9, he had never traveled through the wormhole. He admired the transition, as he could see it. “Leeza,” he said, “Are you ready for adventure?”

“Always ready for venturing!” Leeza proclaimed.

Dieter smiled at her youthful enthusiasm. If she only knew how dangerous it was.

The Hillary's forward momentum stopped. Looking at the ships sensors, he estimated that they were in the negative CTL region.

Meanwhile in the back of the Hillary, Michael had picked Quinna up and moved her limp form to a bed. Although all of her life signs had stopped, she still had the... feel... of someone alive. And then there was the baby, that seemed to be doing fine; completely ignorant of what was going on around it. He knelt beside her, fighting back his feelings. He had to remain Michael Weston, SFI Operative, for no other reason than his own sanity.

Suddenly Quinna grasped his hand and took a deep breath. She did not want to let go. "Why are we in the wormhole?" Quinna asked as she turned her head looking towards the flight area.

Michael was astounded. How was this possible? He pulled out the tricorder and scanned her body. It was as if the last minute had not happened for her. Suddenly a smile appeared on his face, and confusion.

“The wormhole?” he asked. “How do you even know?” He was about to shout out to Dieter.

"I just know, Michael." Quinna took a deep breath, "I feel it." Quinna felt the urge to go sit in the flight area. "Help me up. I have to go." Quinna started to sit up.

Michael put his hand on her, “Are you crazy? First of all you were dead a second ago. And you’re in active labor. That’s the last place you need to go.”

Quinna put her hand on Michael's hand and looked into his eyes, pleading. "I cannot explain it. We just need to go to the front with Dieter and Leeza. We need to be there."

Michael shook his head. He wasn't sure what was crazier, her need to go up to the flight deck, or him actually letting her go. He reached down and helped her to her feet. Then supporting her the whole way they headed to the flight deck.

“Look who’s still with us,” Michael said, as they entered.

Gregory nodded, "Thank the prophets," he said, "Don't go dying on us again, you hear me Doctor," he said in mock anger. The display changed, "There is a landing spot there," he said, "this can't be a coincidence."

(Reply None)
(Posted by Al, Kris and Tim)

[illegible]

Gregory maneuvered the shuttle towards the landing spot. After confirming for the dozenth time, he gingerly set the Hillary down. He began to shut down systems.

“There is an earth like atmosphere,” Michael said. “I’m getting strange energy readings,” he said. “From over... there.” He pointed to a place on the monitor showing a topological map of the area.

Gregory turned on the viewscreen. The area looked like an idelic park setting.

Leeza got excited, and pointed, "Its Aggie," she said excitedly pointing at the viewscreen.

Gregory looked at Michael. Michael looked back leaned over. "Are you seeing anyone?"

Quinna shook her head. "I don't see anything," she quietly said.

Leeza grabbed Dieters hand, "Come on Captain 'Eggrey," she said. "You promised me an 'venture."

He nodded, “That I did,” he said standing up. “Michael, you stay here with Quinna,” he said.

Quinna was not about to argue. She knew that this part was not for her.

Gregory looked around and stood up. He went to the locked cabinet where he withdrew a phaser. Next he grabbed two tricorders and handed one to Leeza.

“OK, We’re as ready as we can be,” he said looking at Quinna and Michael, “We’ll do a quick look around and be right back.”

Quinna sighed but said nothing.

Michael shook his head and put an arm around Quinna, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

The two adventurers waited in the airlock before stepping onto the space. It smelled green and fresh.

"Did we go to the 'rboretum? " Leeza asked, "Are you pullin' my leg?"

Gregory scanned the area, “Not at all,” he replied, looking at the wacking readings on the tricorder.

"They are not whole," came a voice. "There are others." Shimmering into view came a glowing figure of Captain Sekal.

Dieter put his hand down to stop Leeza from running forward as a glowing image of P'Rah entered the area. "Where there was one, there is now two, and where two, there are now four," the spectral Caitain said with a swish of his tail.

“Kitty!” Leeza cried out in surprise.

The spectral P’Rah flashed a toothy grin before morphing into another figure. “Daddy?” she asked with a child’s curiosity. “Where did you go?” The man stood there, looking stern and solemn.

"Kitty, where are you?" Leeza called, "We're 'venturing, are you comin'?" The visage of P'Rah reappeared. "The greatest adventure," he said.

He wasn't sure how he would fight gods, but he was prepared to give it his best shot. What else could he do. He would die for that girl.

"No!" Gregory replied firmly. "She has suffered enough. She stays with me."

"With us," Michael interjected.

Another figure entered the light, it was Aggie. "Of course, love," she replied. "As it is, as it was, as it will always be."

Gregory's face changed at Aggie's words. Realization came over his face as he looked at her. He nodded slowly in understanding.

Turning to face Quinna and Weston, he smiled. "I ... We ... have to go," he said.

Michael looked intensely at his friend. At first it was not clear what he was saying. Then his mind cleared. He wanted to argue with Dieter. He knew that his friend was going to let Leeza go. But how could Michael allow that? Words swarmed in his mind of things he wanted to say, looking for a different way. All he could get out was, "But..."

However the but was to himself. Suddenly his mind filled with images of terror and destruction. Flames burned at the bodies and in the center was Leeza, tears filling her eyes. Then he knew what was going to happen here, no matter what.

Looking at Michael, "I could not have asked for a better first officer, a better advisor, a better friend than you."

Now it was time for another realization. Michael looked from Dieter to the being that appeared as Aggie. He shook his head and fought back a tear. He took Gregory's hand then with more force than he had intended he pulled him into a hug. He couldn't bring himself to say anything more. It was too hard.

Leeza scrambled down and jumped into Weston's arms. Gregory stepped back and snapped to attention, giving Michael a salute. "Carry on Mr. Weston. And protect her," he said, nodding to Quinna.

Michael knelt on the ground and pulled Leeza into his arms. He held onto the girl who had stolen a piece of heart then kissed her on the cheek and then on the forehead. She will always be his morale officer. He could feel his heart aching already.

"You take care of Eggory, Munchkin," his voice croaked. "If you ever need me I will come for you."

"Quinna thank you for your friendship. Who knew how our lives would be intertwined. If things had been different..." he said, letting his voice trail off. "You two keep each other safe," he blinked back a tear. "Here's looking at you kid," he said finally.

"It is time," the giant said.

"Yes, we must get Leeza back in time," Aggie said.

Leeza's head was buried in Weston's shoulder. "I want Mikey to come, too. Mikey needs to come. We are family."

She whispered something in his ear before squeezing him tight again, "Don't forget me Mikey."

“Not possible, shorty,” he replied. “I’ll never be able to look at chocolate cake without thinking of you. Or sit on a plate of spaghetti.” He couldn’t keep the tears from escaping even though he chuckled.

Leeza ran to Quinna, “Keep him safe, he can be a bit headstrong at times,” she said.

Quinna whispered to the little girl, "I know."

“There is one last thing, before we go,” Aggie said and walked over to Quinna. She placed her hand on Quinna’s belly. “It is time for her to come with us. She will grow and fulfill her destiny.”

"No, no, please don't" Quinna pleaded.

Michael felt his panic rise again. He stepped over and put his hand on “Aggies”. “What are you doing?” he warned, his eyes showing danger. His need to protect Quinna and the baby at it’s highest he said, “Leave her alone.”

Aggie turned to Michael, "I can save them both or you can lose them both, but you cannot have it both ways. You must decide." Aggie put a reassuring hand on Michael's. "Life with or without."

He drew in a breath and closed his eyes, feeling out of his depth in this. Quinna had already died once today. Or had she? And he wasn't sure why he was just accepting the word of this... Aggie. But he knew she was speaking the truth. Michael Weston, the eternal cynic, taking someone for their word.

Slowly he withdrew his hand and stepped back. He looked into Quinna's confused eyes. His hand moved to rub her cheek and then he kissed her. "I can't lose you."

Aggie turned back to Quinna. She took Quinna's right hand as she said, "She will be healthy with us." And with that, Aggie stood there holding the baby. She then moved back to Dieter.

Quinna closed her eyes. She could not see what was in front of her. She worked hard to stay upright and not let the tears overwhelm her as all of a sudden she felt empty and alone.

Gregory knelt down again to pick up Leeza. He turned to his two friends, but turned back as he started to choke up. With Aggie on one side, and the Giant on the other, Gregory walked towards the glowing light ... and they disappeared.

There was another flash of light. Michael and Quinna found themselves back on the Hilary. When they looked out the viewport they were no longer in the celestial temple... nor the wormhole..

(Reply None)

(Posted by Al, Kris and Tim)

[illegible]