

The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 1: Preparations

by [The Space Witches](#)

{[Chapter 1](#)} {[Chapter 2](#)} {Chapter 3}



Angel's tapestry

Chapter 3

Demon stood in the doorway to Angel's room, with Lily and Ilas standing on either side of her. She hadn't set foot in this room for nearly eight months. The last time had been three weeks after Angel had been taken from them, when Demon and some of the castle helpers had gone there to tidy up and pack away Angel's things. Demon remembered the smell that had greeted them when they entered the room: over-ripe fruit and cheese gone bad. They had tracked the smell to a bowl and platter sitting by the side of Angel's bed, and Demon had instructed her helpers to get rid of the rotting food. They had then turned their attention to tidying the chaos that reigned in the rooms, putting clothes and books away, tidying the various objects that cluttered so many surfaces, throwing away the potted plants that had died through neglect in the previous weeks.

Now Demon stood in the doorway, looking around the room, regretting the impulse that had made her tidy up. Somehow, when it was tidy, it was no longer Angel's room. She suppressed the pain she felt at

seeing so many of Angel's things again, and turned to Ilas and Lily.

"We need to decide what to take with us. What will Angel want if...when we see her again?" Demon refused to accept that she would never see her sister again. She turned to look at the tapestry on the wall and her eyes filled with tears. The image of Angel sitting astride the unicorn was so beautiful it tore her heart. She swallowed and said, "We must take this at least. Ilas, will you help me get it down?"

Ilas stretched herself upwards, until she matched Demon's height, and between them, they unfastened the tapestry from the wall, with Lily helping them when it was lowered enough for her to reach. They spread it on the floor and looked at it again.

Demon sighed. "I don't really want Matthew to know that I'm taking some of Angel's things with me. He wouldn't understand. I can hide books amongst my own things, but I don't know how to hide this."

Lily smiled up at her. "Don't worry, I'll take it. I'll be taking the tapestry from my room, so I can roll the two together and no one will know. Luke will help me hide it when we're on the Excalibur. He understands how much Angel still means to us."

Demon hugged her little sister. "Thank you. Now, let's see what else we can take. I'll start on the books, if you two go through her other things."

Half an hour later, they had put together a small pile of books, knick-knacks, jewelry, and other items that they were sure Angel would want if she ever returned to them. They were about to leave when Lily stopped dead in her tracks. "Angel's Grimoire!" She darted over to the fireplace and waved her hand across the wall there, hesitating for a moment before crossing the threshold.

"Lily! Are you sure...?" Demon's voice trailed off as Lily disappeared into Angel's workshop. This was something the sisters had never done. Lily, Angel, and Ilas each had their own workshop and that space was inviolable. They couldn't see into those places and never went there, but Angel's workshop was cold and dead now, so perhaps her sister entering it, was not quite the outrage it would once have been.

Demon and Ilas crossed to the threshold, but went no further. Neither felt comfortable about going in. They watched as Lily walked to the large reading stand that stood in the center of the room, and lifted the heavy book that lay there. She brought it over to Demon and held it out to her. "It would be best if you looked after this, Demon. Ilas and I each have our own books, and they might conflict with this. You've never used these powers and never compiled your own Grimoire. You are best placed to take custody of this."

Demon took the book and nodded. She would keep it hidden amongst all the other books she planned to take with her on the Excalibur. Matthew would never notice a few extra books belonging to Angel amongst so many. She watched as Lily walked over to a shelf on one side of the workshop and picked up three of the glass balls that lay there. They started to glow as soon as Lily touched them and Demon smiled. Angel's use of the balls of sight had caused many a disagreement between them, but Demon nodded. When they finally found Angel, she would want them back.

The sisters left the workshop carrying Angel's possessions between them, all convinced that one day they would be able to return to her some of the things she had left behind. Demon turned in the doorway and looked back into the room where she and her sister had fought so often. She would have given anything for one more argument with Angel.

Looking back she whispered, "I will find you, Angel. Somehow, somewhere, I'll find you and give you back everything important that you lost. I'll never give up." Demon closed the door gently behind her and walked away.

Angel stood watching the crowd of shoppers in the busy market, her eyes peeled for an easy mark. Someone, preferably a female, who wasn't keeping a close hand on her bag, and who was too busy browsing to notice her. As her eyes roamed over the myriad races, they locked on a Brakiri couple, instantly throwing her mind in turmoil, casting her thoughts back painfully through the events that had led to her current situation.

After Nikarran had gotten her away from Eriadne, they had ended up here on Mars, a place where he'd believed they could get lost, and where Gideon and the authorities wouldn't find her. Ninety percent of the population of Mars was human, so Angel could get lost in the crowds. Using the false identity documents that he'd taken from Lucas, Nikarran had managed to get them through Security without any trouble, and from then on, he'd taken care of everything, including her.

He had managed to sell all Lily's jewelry for a good price, providing them with enough money, not to live in the lap of luxury, but comfortably, for some time. She'd not been in any condition to help, broken psychologically from everything that had happened, and from learning the truth about the terrible price paid for bringing Lucas back. Nikarran took charge of everything, finding them a small but comfortable apartment to live in, and taking care of everything else that was needed.

Angel closed her eyes on the pain she felt whenever she thought about Nikarran. He had been so good to her. For a long time she'd barely functioned, and if it hadn't been for him, she probably would have died, her will to live not strong enough to keep her going through the pain.

The first month had been the most difficult. The sorrow, anguish, and guilt she felt at the part she'd played in causing the death of Dureena's baby and for what had happened to Lucas, had eaten her alive, causing her to withdraw from reality, refusing to eat or do anything. But Nikarran hadn't given up on her. When she had refused to eat, he would coax, nag, and even bully her until she ate something. When she'd woken up every night screaming from nightmares, he would be there, holding her, comforting her, telling her that everything would be all right. Every day, he would talk, trying to make her smile with silly little jokes, slowly bringing her back to life.

Slowly but surely, his comfort and support had brought Angel back from the dark place where she'd been lost. Day by day, with Nikarran's help, she had started to function again. And he was there for her when she sobbed at the thought of never seeing her sisters again, and when she was finally able to talk about everything that had happened. He'd listened, not judging, not condemning, telling her that she couldn't blame herself, and that he knew she would never have brought Lucas back if she'd known the price that would be paid. Although Angel blamed herself, Nikarran didn't, and that had prevented her from giving up, and helped her to start rebuilding herself and her life.

Then everything had gone terribly wrong. Just when she was starting to feel that everything would be all right, she had lost him. The man she had once loved to tease mercilessly, who had become her best friend, her rock and her support, had been taken away from her, murdered in the street, in cold blood.

Angel pressed herself against the wall, holding onto it for support as the painful thoughts made her legs buckle. She tried to stop the memory, but it was like a raging fire, burning out of control,

unstoppable.

Nikarran had told her one morning that he was going to look for a job. Although they had enough money from the sale of Lily's jewelry to live off for a while, provided they were careful, he thought it time he supplemented that money to make it last longer. He left, telling her that he would be back in time for the dinner she had promised to make him. That was the last time Angel ever saw him.

As the hours passed with no sign of him, she'd become panic-stricken and afraid. In her heart, Angel knew something had happened, something very bad, to prevent him from coming home. So she'd gone out looking for him, overcoming the fear she felt whenever she left the apartment.

She'd been walking for an hour, with no idea of where to look, when she came to a bar, outside of which were a group of people and several Mars Security officers. Angel was about to turn around, afraid that they would know who she was, when she heard something that made her stop. She'd listened in horror as the Security men took statements from the people about a Brakiri man, whose name matched that which Nikarran used on his fake identification documents, who had been viciously stabbed to death outside the bar. She listened in disbelief as one witness, apparently the bar owner, told them that the man had come in looking for work. He had left when he'd told him that he didn't have anything available. Several minutes later, the bar owner had heard a scream from outside and he had rushed out to find the man dying. He'd immediately yelled for someone to get Security, while he tried to help the man.

Angel had stood there, shaking, as the bar owner went on to tell Security, in answer to their questions, that Nikarran had only managed to say one word, 'Angel', before he died. Upon hearing her name, she'd fled in anguish back to the apartment, unable to stay there and listen any further.

Back at the apartment, Angel fell apart, going back to the dark place filled with guilt, pain, and sorrow. Nikarran was gone...dead. She couldn't think how or why someone would kill him. In the long days that followed, she began to blame herself. If it weren't for her, Nikarran would never have been on Mars, would never have been outside that bar, and wouldn't have been killed. Her guilt increased whenever she thought about not having gone to the authorities to claim his body, or to at least inform them of where he was from, so that his body could be returned to his family on Eriadne for a proper burial. That had been just over three months ago.

Angel was startled back from her thoughts by someone shouting nearby. She looked up, always ready for flight. She soon saw that it was nothing to worry about, just some street vendor yelling at a scruffy, bedraggled tramp who was hanging around too close to his stall. The distraction made her aware of something warm and wet running down her face. She raised a dirt-streaked hand, with its dirty, broken nails, and wiped away the tears she had shed unknowingly. Angel looked at her fingers, damp from the salty water and immediately she was swept back into the past as the tears reminded her of how great her loss of Nikarran had really been.

The days that passed after his death left Angel in a state of complete shock. She was alone now, having to look after herself, something of which she had little experience. Her knowledge of money was limited. On Eriadne, there had been no need for it, and when she had been on Babylon 5, Lucas had taken care of everything. She'd never needed to know how to handle money. As a result, it wasn't long before all the credits from the jewelry were gone, and when she was unable to pay the rent on the apartment, she was evicted. With no place to go and no one to go to, she was forced to live on the streets.

It had been a hard time, not knowing how to fend for herself. Pretty soon, Angel looked as unkempt

and hungry as the down-and-outs amongst whom she was now living, in the seedier parts of Mars Dome. Getting food and water was the most difficult thing. Watching other homeless, she'd learned that some restaurants would give hand outs, but the number of hungry mouths far outnumbered the handouts, and sometimes she went days without food.

Where she found herself was also dangerous, a place where the homeless frequently attacked each other for what little they had. Angel had been fortunate; many homeless stayed away from her, having learned that she could fight like a wild animal, and once she had cast a fire spell, they steered clear of her, many of them being superstitious. They believed her to be a witch, [if only they knew,] and were afraid of her and what she could do.

It had been a lonely, painful existence, then one day she met Carla, a brash Earther and member of the notorious Thieves Guild. Angel had been scrounging through a disposal unit for something that she could sell or exchange for something to eat. It had been days since she'd eaten; she was weak from hunger and her health was deteriorating fast.

Angel let out a small dry laugh at the memory. To this day, she didn't remember how things had happened so fast. Before she knew it, Carla had swept her along, bought her a hot meal and in the days that followed, took her under her wing. Angel hadn't wanted to become friends with her, but Carla wasn't one to take no for an answer, telling her that she'd seen Angel around, and had been watching her slowly dying. Carla may have been a thief, but she was a human being, and she'd said that she couldn't live with herself if she just watched Angel die.

"Angel girl, the truth is that you won't survive the way you are going. You stick with me and I'll teach you how to take care of yourself." And that's what she'd done. Taking her under her wing, Carla had taught Angel how to become a thief, stealing just enough credits to feed herself.

At first she'd rebelled against the idea, but Carla had soon made her realize that people do whatever they must to survive. But then three weeks before, just when Angel was feeling that there was hope and that she would be all right, Carla had been caught stealing from a vendor. Angel had been with her, but had managed to get away. From a safe place, she'd watched as Carla was arrested and taken away. Even now, Angel didn't know where Carla was or what had become of her.

With Carla gone, Angel was once again alone. But this time, thanks to Carla's teachings, she was able to steal. She'd been taught by Carla what to look for in what she had called 'a mark' and how to approach and remove a purse without detection, and that is what she'd been doing ever since to survive. Angel was a thief.

That last thought brought her back to the present. Inhaling a deep shaky breath, she pushed herself away from the wall. There was little time for her to waste on painful memories; they didn't help her and only opened up old wounds. For a moment, Angel's focus faltered, and her mind went blank, something that happened to her often these days. It was like her mind was shutting down, and whenever she came out of the nothingness, she wondered if one day she would stay that way, not thinking, not feeling. The thought terrified her, but sometimes she wished it would happen, because at times like that, she didn't feel any pain, didn't remember.

Angel shook her head. "Snap out of it, you pathetic fool," she growled at herself as she ran a hand through her dirty, tangled hair. She tried again to focus her attention on the crowd in front of her, but laughter distracted her. She was about to ignore it, when she realized that two loud voices were talking about her. From where she stood, Angel couldn't see who they were, but she recognized the voices of two brothers, a pair of loathsome troublemakers, who always preyed upon the weaker members of the

homeless community. She listened as they talked about her.

"I bet that Angel was a looker once," said the first brother. Angel tried to remember his name, but it escaped her.

The second brother, Les, grunted like the pig he was. "Operative word being 'once'. Now a Pak'ma'ra would think twice about snacking on her corpse--and they ain't exactly picky eaters." The first brother laughed, which brought about a fit of coughing. Angel wished he'd choke and die.

"Yeah, I mean I would have happily fucked her when she looked better, but now I wouldn't touch her with yours." He grinned lasciviously. "I mean, she used to bother with cleaning herself up a little, especially before going out stealing. But have you got close to her recently? It's enough to make you wish there was a breeze so you could get upwind of her. She stinks." Les, the Pig, grunted again in agreement.

"And she sure ain't got all her lights on upstairs. You seen her talking to herself? Now I never can stand it when a woman talks all the time, let alone to herself. Then again, who else would be willing to get close enough to talk to her?" Angel listened as the two brothers continued talking about her. There was once a time when it didn't bother her what people said about her, especially scum like them. But the truth hurt.

Angel turned away, shutting their voices out, and looked down at herself. She knew she was a sight, her clothes were torn and dirty, the pants and top, once bright red, were now a dirty muddy brown, and she had to admit that they didn't smell too fresh, either. Neither did she, for that matter, but getting enough water to drink was difficult. Finding enough to wash in was more of an effort than she had the will to make. Getting into an unoccupied room at a hotel was tricky and risky and after Carla was arrested, and Security was clamping down more on crime, she was too afraid.

So it had been days since Angel had a good wash, making do with a wet rag to clean as much of the grime off as she could. Her once lustrous, shiny, raven hair was now dirty and matted. Absently she thought about it; no amount of combing would get the knots out, only a pair of scissors could do that now. She chased that thought away, and raised her hands in front of her face, taking in the sight of them. Like the rest of her they showed the weight she had lost, the bones clearly defined beneath her skin. And also like the rest of her, they were grimy, the nails broken and jagged.

Angel didn't need to look in a mirror to know that she was painfully thin, her features gaunt, her cheeks hollow and her bones prominent, or that beneath the dirt and grime, she was deathly pale--her once bright eyes dull and lifeless with permanent dark rings under them. As the brothers suspected, she'd once been a looker, beautiful even, but now she looked as ugly as she felt. Maybe it was a good thing that most people didn't really take notice of people like her. Angel thought they couldn't face what people like her represented, the truth that you can lose everything and end up just like her.

Angel shuddered, and wondered how she had managed to sink so low. She closed her eyes. She knew how. A stupid, selfish, unthinking act and falling in love with the wrong man had brought her to where she was now--alone, homeless, unkempt, and a thief. Suddenly, she started to laugh; it was a hollow, empty, almost insane laugh coming not from humor, but from sadness and pain. She deserved everything that was happening to her.

As the laughter began to die away, Angel felt and heard her stomach growl, reminding her loudly and even painfully of the reason she was here. It had been two days since she'd had anything to eat. There had been a strong Security presence at the market, making it too dangerous for her to work. Today

things were safer, no Security that she could see, except for the usual one or two who were always there, but they were easy to avoid.

Closing her eyes, and forcing herself to pull her wits about her, she turned her attention back to the crowd. A few minutes of scanning, then Angel smiled as she saw a woman looking over some bolts of Minbari fabric. The woman had a bag draped loosely over her shoulder, not even holding on to it, as her hands roamed and felt the rich fabrics. A perfect mark.

Angel moved into the crowd, keeping alert for Security while she also kept her attention on the mark. Carefully, she made her way closer to the woman. When she was a few feet away, Angel stopped, looking around her, quickly plotting her escape route. Then she looked back at the woman one more time, making sure the bag was still easy to grab, and that she could get close enough to snatch it and run. With adrenaline coursing through her veins, she started forward, slowly at first, then she broke into a run as she reached the woman. She reached out her hand, her fingers grabbing hold of the strap, never breaking stride as she yanked it off the woman's shoulder. It came away easily. In a deft movement, Angel slung it over her head, so that her hands were free to push past other people as she ran, hell for leather, through the crowd.

The woman's screaming, "Stop her! She has my purse!" pushed Angel to move faster. Her heart almost stopped as she looked up to see two Security men bearing down on her. Dodging to the right, she cut through between two stalls, knocking into one of them, causing the contents to fall off, bottles of whatever smashing all over the ground, but she didn't stop. One of the Security guards was catching up to her, yelling at her to stop.

That wasn't an option. If she got caught, the least of her worries was being convicted of stealing. They could find out about her and the fact that she was wanted for murder. Angel looked around. The two men were still hot on her heels, and she had to lose them fast. These days she wasn't as strong as she used to be; she knew she couldn't keep running for long. Up ahead, she saw that the crowd was thicker than elsewhere. Running towards them, she pushed into the crowd, her pace slowed by the people around her. Thinking quickly, she hunched forward, making herself smaller and as she came to an alleyway, she ducked down it, hiding behind a large trash disposal unit.

Pressing herself behind it, her breathing heavy, she waited to see if she had fooled them. Angel stuck her head out to see the Security guards go racing past, pushing their way through the crowd. She closed her eyes and let out a shaky breath. Not wasting time, knowing that it wouldn't take them long to realize that she hadn't gone that way, she stood up and approached the end of the alley. Craning her head around the side, she checked to make sure that they had gone on, and that they wouldn't look back to see her. Satisfied to see them continuing ahead, turning their heads left and right looking for her, Angel moved out of the alley, and headed back in the opposite direction. She kept looking back even as she left the market place and headed into the section where she lived.

Only when she was back in what people called the Place of Lost Souls did Angel relax a little. Stopping at a dumpster, she opened the bag, and quickly found a small brown purse, which she shook. The soft tinkling sound caused her to smile. Holding onto it tightly, she looked back in the bag. She frowned with disappointment when she didn't find anything there that she would be able to exchange for food. Sometimes the marks had a nice bottle of perfume or make-up or a pen in their bag, items that were welcomed in exchange for a meal.

"Oh well, can't win all the time," said Angel dryly as she tossed the bag in the dumpster and walked away, not letting the disappointment drag her down.

She made her way to where she spent most of her time, a small section at the end of a deserted building, which she shared with a dozen or so others. Sitting down on the pile of old blankets that served as her bed, with hands still shaking from fear and adrenaline, she opened the purse and emptied its contents in front of her. Angel smiled as she saw that there were enough credits there to feed her for several days. She looked at the small pile of credits for a few moments longer, then scooped them up in her hand and put them back in the purse. Standing up, she shoved the purse into her pocket. Then she stood chewing her bottom lip as she decided what she would get herself to eat. A hungry smile played on her lips.

Licking her lips in anticipation of a meal, Angel headed out, telling her stomach to be quiet as it growled again. Angel was oblivious to the stares from others as she walked past them. She was talking to herself, well, really talking to her stomach, asking what it felt like for dinner. Tonight the two of them wouldn't have to go to bed hungry. As she walked on, her mind was no longer haunted by painful memories, the only thing she could think about was food.

Luke Raven sat on top of the hill, legs crossed and arms lightly resting on his knees, his eyes closed as he enjoyed the warm sunlight and the soft breeze caressing his face for what might well be the last time in years.

Earlier that afternoon, he'd called his sister, Sara, on the comm. equipment in Demon's room to inform her of his decision to accept the post on the Excalibur.

"Luke, that's fantastic!" she'd exclaimed, but she'd quickly noticed that something was bothering him. When he'd reluctantly admitted to her what it was, Sara had shaken her head. "Luke, I'm not a child anymore, and you should really know by now that I can look after myself very well."

He'd grinned sheepishly. "I know, but still..."

"No 'buts', Luke Raven. You have your own family now, and I'm doing great. Near or far, I know that you'll always be there for me, and that's enough." She'd eyed him closely for a few seconds, then asked, "What does your heart tell you, Luke?"

He'd taken a very, very deep breath, then said softly, "That I can't live without them anymore. I need them, all of them. To have John with us for a few days and have him leave again for months..." Luke briefly closed his eyes as the fresh pain from the last goodbye surged up inside him, but reminded himself that soon they'd all be, and stay, together.

He'd looked at his sister again who smiled at him sympathetically. "I don't know how he managed all this time. I know I couldn't." He'd sighed. "Yes, I really want to do this. Not only because this is the only way for us to be together, but also because this will probably be the most interesting and challenging mission, from a medical point of view, that Earth Alliance or the Interstellar Alliance have to offer, short of the quest for another cure. And while being cooped up inside a ship isn't my first choice, I'll get the chance to participate in away missions, to discover new planets and cultures."

Sara had smiled as she saw her brother's eyes sparkle when he was talking about the possibilities his future held. "Then listen to your heart, Luke. I'm happy if you're happy."

He'd smiled at her warmly. "That I am. Thank you, little sister."

Luke had blown her a kiss, and Sara had returned one, then asked, "By the way--is there a chance of you visiting here with your new family before you disappear into deep space?"

"I really don't know yet. I'd love to, and if we come near Deneb I'll try everything I can, but I can't make any promises."

"I hope you'll find a way. I'd love to meet Lily--we'd get along fabulously I think. Oh, and I'd really like to get to know John better. I don't have such hunky young men walking into the practice every day, after all." Sara's eyes were twinkling mischievously.

"Hands off our lovely telepath, little sister, or Lily may decide to try out some new dagger techniques on you."

She'd pouted. "But I thought she always told you to share."

Luke had shaken his head. "I think I'll have to talk to a certain Dr. Roberts about his secretary and girlfriend."

"Oops! OK, I never said anything about a certain lovely telepath."

He'd laughed. "I love you, little sister. Tell Steve I want him to take good care of you."

"I will. And I love you too, big brother. Don't forget me when you're out there." Sara had put her hand on the screen, and he'd done the same, touching his fingertips to the image of hers.

"I won't."

She'd given him one last smile before signing off, but he'd still caught the hint of tears shining in her eyes.

For a while, Luke had sat there with his elbows on the console, leaning his head in his hands, but the pain he'd felt hadn't weighed him down as his guilt had after John had offered him this post. Suddenly, he'd felt like sitting on the hill for a spell, and since Lily was at the village--she'd started teaching again a few hours every day and always took the twins with her--he hadn't felt like staying in their rooms alone, anyway. So he'd left the castle, leaving a message for Lily with the guard at the gate.

He let his thoughts return to the present again, concentrating on feeling the sun warming his body, the breeze on his face and hands and in his hair, the earth and grass beneath him.

Suddenly he felt a pair of arms embrace him from behind.

"Meditating, doctor?"

Without opening his eyes, Luke smiled and answered, "Yes, teacher," then added, "Where are the twins?"

Lily rubbed her cheek against his and slid a hand under his shirt. "They're with Ilas, Max, and Dureena." She giggled. "Vya is already as big as they were after two months!"

Luke smiled. "If giving birth were so easy for all women, the universe would be overpopulated in no

time."

Lily chuckled as she remembered Vya's birth a week after the Excalibur had left. It had only taken a few minutes. With Ilas' ability to change her body, she'd simply been able to let Vya slide out of her once she'd felt it was time, and there he'd been, bigger and more developed than any human child at birth. "Still, I wouldn't want to change anything about the birth of Faylinn and Dasha." Her hand had reached Luke's left nipple, and she started massaging it softly. "So what made you come up here?"

Luke let out a little contented sigh. "I just wanted to be outside. To have the wind take my last lingering doubts with it."

"And did it work?"

"It did."

"Good." She kissed his cheek lightly. "How's Sara?"

Luke smiled, well aware of her unasked question. "She's fine. More than fine, I think." He turned to look at Lily. "And me, too." He found himself captivated by her amazing green eyes once more, gazing at him full of warmth, love, and trust. "God, Lily, sometimes it frightens me how much I love you."

Lily felt her heart aching sweetly as her love for this man surged up inside her. For several seconds she could only look at him, then finally whispered, "Same here," and kissed him softly, deeply.

Luke's left hand came up to her neck when he let himself sink back onto the green grass, taking her with him and closing his arms around her tightly. She ended up lying on top of him, and he could feel her hips moving against his. He gasped and gently pulled her head back by the hair. "Not here."

"Why not?" Lily asked with a grin, "I didn't realize you minded an audience. Besides, it wouldn't be the first time."

Luke smiled. No it wouldn't--he still had fond memories of the first time Lily had led John and him up here during their second visit to Eriadne. "Are you talking about that delicious dessert you served John and me up here all those months ago?" he asked teasingly while tracing his fingers along the side of her face.

"The very one," she answered with a naughty grin, "Would you like some?" It was quite clear from her look that she wouldn't accept a 'No'.

[Dear God, her eyes...] Luke sighed. "I never could resist that one." He let himself get lost in Lily's kisses and caresses.

They lay snuggled together in the warm sunlight, Lily's head resting on Luke's shoulder and her left hand on his chest, languidly playing with his nipple, her left leg hooked over his. She felt his hand softly stroke her hair and sighed contentedly. Luke, who'd been looking up into the sky but not really seeing anything, turned his head to look down at her. "Happy?"

Lily lifted her head, smiling at him. "Very." She gazed at him for a while, then kissed him softly. "Second thoughts?"

He shook his head. "No."

Lily felt a chill run up her spine at the intense way he gazed at her. "What is it?"

He studied her face for a few more seconds, then said, "I've been thinking about my life, and," he gave a short laugh, "this sounds crazy, but looking back from where I am now, it almost seems as if everything happened so I would meet you and John."

Lily waited for him to continue as he paused, encouraging him without words. He hadn't told them a lot about his past except that he'd lived on Earth until his parents moved to Deneb IV, and bits and pieces about his time at med school and his job as a doctor, and of course about his sister, Sara, to whom he was very close. She sensed that this gap in their knowledge would now be filled.

Luke closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, and then looked up to the sky. After gathering his thoughts he launched into the story of his life.

Luke Raven had been born on Earth, in a small town called Glastonbury in England. Despite the many people coming there because of its connection to the Arthurian legends, it had remained small, and the abbey ruins as well as the exceptional landscape in and around town gave it a very special, distinct note. Luke had roamed the town and the area around it often. He knew all the places that drew all kinds of visitors there: White and Red Spring, Glastonbury Abbey ruins, Wearyall Hill, Glastonbury Zodiac, and then of course, there was the Tor, the hill that legend said was the home of Gwyn ap Nudd, the Lord of the Underworld.

Both of his parents were loving and understanding and granted their children a lot of freedom, but also taught them to take on responsibility. Their father had worked as a researcher at a pharmaceutical company, helping to develop new medications. His mother had helped out at a local bookshop two days a week, where little Sara was the darling of all customers. Little Luke had been happy to go to the bookstore after school, and to read until the shop closed.

Then everything changed. After some very promising new species of plants had been discovered on Deneb IV, the pharmaceutical company that Luke's father worked for decided to transfer his department to that planet, and if he wanted to keep his job he was forced to move there too. Luke was almost twelve, finishing sixth grade in school, and Sara was five, about to start kindergarten. Luke didn't want to leave, but his parents had assured him that they wouldn't do it if they had a choice, and that Deneb IV was similar to Earth.

While that had been true, Luke could never bring himself to think of Deneb IV as his 'real' home. Sara adapted more easily due to her younger age, but for Luke it wasn't that simple. While he'd never been one to get into trouble with others, he didn't easily make close friends, either. To fit in better, he'd soon started working on his British accent until it was almost non-existent. He spent most of his free time reading or exploring the new landscape, at first alone, then together with Sara. At first, he'd been annoyed at having his little sister trudging along but then discovered that she shared his love of exploring and he was surprised to find that he actually enjoyed their jaunts together more than his solitary ones. They were soon inseparable, despite the age gap of seven years, and his father came to jokingly call them 'the unidentical twins'.

Toward the end of high school, Luke started to think about what he wanted to do with his life. He'd

always been interested in medicine, triggered by his father's talking about his work, though neither of his parents had any intention of influencing his career choice. Luke had always enjoyed helping others, and becoming a doctor seemed a good way for him to do that. Graduating high school early at seventeen, he went on to major in Biology at college, and got accepted at the Capital's university medical school. Working at the university hospital's ER during his electives in med school, with a few grueling cases, had brought Luke to think that he could do the most good there. That was why, after graduation, he completed his residency at the ER, specializing in Emergency Medicine.

After finishing the residency, Luke was surprised when he was offered a permanent job in the ER. It took a special personality to work in the ER--someone able to flip from the serious to the not-so-serious, from the tragic to the comedic without letting it show in his bedside manner. Most doctors didn't want a damn thing to do with the ER: too much work, too much pressure and far too little monetary rewards to even look at a career in that field. If he wanted the money, he should have become a podiatrist. He'd soon worked up the career ladder, and when the head of the ER unit quit for a job on Proxima III, she'd recommended Luke as her successor. What little free time he had in those years, he'd spent catching up on sleep, with his family, or outside.

One day, when he'd just started his night shift, he'd been called to the reception area. Sara was at the comm, and he could tell by the strange expression on her face and the sound of her voice that something was wrong.

"They're dead," she'd said, her voice toneless.

He'd known instantly, but he'd still asked, "Who?" leaning on the table heavily, ignoring the nurse's concerned look.

"Mum and Dad."

He'd felt his jaw drop, as if to cry out, but no sound emerged. After several seconds, he'd finally been able to croak, "How?" Trying hard not to cry, Sara had told him that the police had just been there, telling her that their parents had been killed in a road accident. Their skimmer had been hit by a transport whose driver's attention had wandered for a moment. They'd died instantly.

"Luke, what will we do now?" His mind had been numb, but he'd told her that he'd be there immediately and signed off. As if on autopilot, he'd organized for someone to take over his shift, then driven to Sara's apartment, unable to feel anything. It had been as if a hole was where his heart used to be. Only when he'd found himself in Sara's embrace had the tears come. They'd stood there and cried for what seemed like hours.

From that point on, everything had gone downhill. He couldn't get to grips with his parents being so suddenly gone, and he'd felt guilty for not spending more time with them. Since they'd bought a house in Tripoli, a small town just outside the Capital, he hadn't visited them as often as he'd used to. And now they were gone. Dead. He'd drunk himself into a stupor that night, and if not for Sara's support, and his realization that she needed support and love as much as he did right now, he may well have ended up as an alcoholic. Standing above their parent's grave, he'd silently sworn to always be there for his sister, to look after her, no matter what.

On his first day back at the ER, he'd found himself barely able to function in that hectic environment anymore. When he'd gotten home, he'd found a message from Steve Roberts, a friend from med school who now had his own practice in a town next to Tripoli. Steve had asked him to call back; he had important news for him. When Luke did, Roberts told him that they were looking for a doctor in

Tripoli. "I've been able to care for both towns until now, but they're growing quickly, and it would be better to have one doctor in each town. And since your parents had that house in Tripoli..."

Luke had just stared at him for a long while, his mind reeling. To be back in a small town, to have a quieter life, a more peaceful job? Finally he'd said, "Steve, are you aware that you're probably saving my life with this idea?"

Roberts had smiled and said, "Well, that's what doctors are supposed to do."

So Luke had quit the ER and moved to Tripoli with Sara, who'd volunteered to work as his receptionist. They'd planned and built the practice into the ground floor of the house they'd inherited from their parents, living on the top two floors, and during that time, Steve had helped Luke get himself acquainted with the details of general practice, as well as his future patients. He'd taken the patients over one by one, finding that he enjoyed working with people on a long-term basis, especially with children. One summer evening when he was sitting out on the porch swing with Sara, he was surprised to find that for the first time in months, maybe even years, he was happy again.

Lily was watching Luke closely, noticing the small smile as he remembered the time he'd lived with his sister. Lily had turned onto her stomach next to him as he'd begun his tale, propping herself up on her elbows, and now changed to lie on her side, holding her head up with her right hand while the left languidly caressed his almost hairless chest. "And then the Excalibur came," she said softly.

Luke shook himself out of his reverie and turned his head to look at her. "Yes, then the Excalibur came." He'd already told her about that in Excalibur's Medbay, when John had been recovering from Lucas' nearly fatal PPG shot. The medical staff on the Excalibur had consisted of specialists and nurses, none of whom had any leadership experience, so when Sarah Chambers had her near-breakdown, there was no one suitable who could replace her.

They'd been near Deneb IV at that time, and Gideon had asked the government for help. None of the hospitals had been able to spare any of the doctors who'd fit the criteria that Gideon had specified, but the university hospital's director had offered to contact Dr. Luke Raven, former head of their ER unit, who now had a general practice. Gideon had agreed, and the director had arranged for a meeting at the hospital. Luke had liked Gideon as soon as he met him, and had been excited by the opportunity that the short-term assignment aboard the Excalibur presented. Coming from Earth originally, he still felt a strong bond to the planet and wanted to do whatever he could to help with the search for a cure to the Drakh plague. Gideon had assured Luke that what they needed right now was not a virologist, but someone to lead the Medbay team and keep its staff functioning until Dr. Chambers got back. So Luke had accepted Gideon's offer, after making sure that Dr. Roberts could take over his patients.

For a moment they were quiet, then Luke spoke. "Lily?"

"Hmm?"

"You *are* aware that you won't be able to 'grow' our quarters on the Excalibur into whatever shape or material you want them to be, aren't you?"

Lily looked at him askance. "Of course I am!"

He grinned. "Just checking."

Lily gave him an admonishing smile. "Still not over it?"

"Somehow I doubt I ever will be."

Luke still shivered when he remembered how the connecting door between Lily's room and the nursery, as well as the final look of that room itself, had come to be. Somehow the sisters--with the help of a few spells--had just *thought* it into shape. They'd linked and started chanting softly in a strange language and the wooden floor had grown, or maybe turned into, a soft beige carpet. The room had continued to transform over the next hour, slowly but constantly--corners and edges rounded, the bright white walls turned a soft cream shade and paintings of landscapes appeared on them, a different one on each wall, representing the four directions and the element belonging to each one. There were dolphins swimming in an ocean for west and water, a volcano for south and fire, a flock of birds flying across a deep blue sky for east and air, and a meadow full of flowers with mountains in the background for north and earth. Finally, a wooden door had appeared in the wall of Lily's room, fairytale figures carved into--[Or would 'molded out of' be the more correct term?] Luke thought--its surface.

As Lily had explained afterwards, that was how the four of them had ended up having such individual rooms. Apparently, the field that surrounded the castle not only regulated the temperature but the whole building itself, and it reacted to the witches' wishes. He'd already seen that on his first visit, when Lily had triggered the shower with her mind, but he'd never imagined this could possibly work on such a large scale.

"Maybe we shouldn't have let you watch us." Lily said in an unsure voice, eyeing him with concern.

He shook his head. "No, it's OK. I know the Vorlons are far more advanced than any of the races we usually deal with. It's just a bit much to suddenly discover that your lover can manipulate buildings at her will." He gave her an exaggerated bewildered stare, making her laugh.

"Only inside the shield, unfortunately." She grinned at him mischievously. "Just imagine, the bridge of the Excalibur with a green marble floor and gilded chairs, and Medbay all in ebony..."

{[Chapter 1](#)} {[Chapter 2](#)} {Chapter 3}

The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

{[Part 1: Preparations](#)} {[Part 2: Goodbyes and Hellos](#)} {[Part 3: Twists and Turns](#)} {[Part 4: Crossroads](#)} {[Part 5: New Horizons](#)}