

# The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 2: Goodbyes and Hellos

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Unexpected, though not uninvited, guests: Alwyn and Sarah

## Chapter 2

Angel lay curled up on her makeshift bed, her legs drawn up tightly against her chest with her arms wrapped around her. Her body was covered in sweat and she was racked with uncontrollable shaking after the nightmare from which she had woken, screaming, moments before. Another nightmare about her sisters, about Dureena's baby and about Lucas. A nightmare filled with images of Dureena asking Angel how she could have done what she did, to cause her baby's death. Of her sisters disappearing before her eyes, becoming lost to her. Of Gideon coming for her, accusing her of cold-blooded murder, telling her that she deserved to suffer for what she'd done. Worst of all were the images of Lucas.

Her eyes were open, staring unfocused at the wall in front of her, as she whimpered while her thoughts raced from one topic to the next. First, came the thoughts of her sisters. Every day, it was like a white-hot burning pain, the way she missed them so much. She longed for them since her link had been broken; there was a black hole where they should have been. Angel moaned and hugged her legs even tighter. Her sisters would all have had their babies by now, babies she now believed she would never see, who would never know her.

There was a wet salty taste in her mouth as the tears flowed freely down her cheeks, wetting dry lips, but Angel couldn't find the will to lift her hand to her face to wipe them away. She wondered how they were, if her sisters missed her, or if they were relieved that she was gone, no longer able to cause them trouble. Angel whimpered softly, shaking away those dark thoughts as she remembered Demon's letter. They had wanted her to get away, so that she wouldn't be arrested along with Lucas. She had to believe that they still loved her, thought about her, and missed her as much as she did them. In some little way, it helped her to not give up completely. For the thousandth time, she wished that she still had Demon's letter to remind her of how much they loved her.

But positive thoughts like that were always overrun by darker negative ones, like the thoughts, memories and fears of the man who lay at the heart of everything that had happened to her. Lucas.

Angel tried to not let her mind go there. Sitting up abruptly with her back to the wall, her legs drawn up against her, she took several breaths, trying to clear her mind of him, roughly wiping away the tears. But the nightmare and the fact that she couldn't forget him prevented any hope of respite for her.

Over the past months, she hadn't gone one day without thinking about him, remembering, wondering, wishing. Round and round until she felt dizzy and sick from it all. Not one day went by when Angel didn't look over her shoulder, watching and fearing that he would be there, coming for her. She always tried to tell herself that it wouldn't happen, that Lucas wouldn't be able to come for her, having found out for sure that she was the one who had betrayed him, and make her suffer for it, before he killed her.

One possibility, the one that tore her heart to pieces each time she considered it, was that he had died from his injuries. No matter how much Angel hated him for what he'd done, for having killed Dureena's baby and lied to her, she still loved him. The thought of him being dead was too much for her to bear. A second possibility, and one she also had trouble believing, was that Lucas had been tried and found guilty of Dureena's baby's death, had been mind wiped, and was now out there somewhere, serving others, a new man with no memory of the past. But she knew Lucas. If he had survived, he would have found a way to escape before that happened. Meaning that he was still out there, still a threat to her and her sisters, especially to Demon and her son.

Angel shuddered and cursed herself. She had to stop doing this, or one day she would go completely insane. At that thought, she gave a snort, she was well on her way already, and she knew it. She sighed heavily, again telling herself she deserved everything, that she was a bad person, responsible for the death of an unborn baby, responsible for bringing back a man who had consumed her and destroyed her in the process, responsible for Nikarran's death. Responsible for putting her sisters' lives in danger. Responsible, responsible, RESPONSIBLE! Angel let out an anguished cry and clamped her hands over her ears as a voice echoed that word over and over again in her head until she screamed out loud "SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT UP!

Suddenly it went quiet, and she dropped her shaking arms to her sides. Then slowly she stood up, using the wall for support as a wave of dizziness hit her. Closing her eyes and clenching her jaw, she waited for it to pass. When it receded Angel opened her eyes slowly. She knew that the dizziness was a sign that she wasn't well, that her health was deteriorating from lack of care and a healthy diet. Breathing deeply, she pushed herself away from the wall. She had to get out of there, away from the memories and the thoughts.

The day before, she'd used the last of the credits she had obtained from her last outing, and she needed to go out again, if she didn't want to go hungry for another day. Angel didn't feel like it, physically or

emotionally, but she knew that finding a mark would keep her mind off other things. For a while at least.

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Angel emerged from The Place of Lost Souls. Cutting through an alley, she slowly entered a street alongside the market. As she walked along the fringe of the market, which held several places for her to watch and observe unseen, she caught sight of her reflection in the window of a store. Stopping in her tracks, she turned and looked at the state she was in. She had known she looked bad but not having seen herself in a mirror in God knows how long, it shocked her to see just how bad she looked.

She raised a hand to her face, running a hand over her cheek, gaunt and streaked with dirt. To say that she was unkempt was an understatement; she looked like someone who had been to hell and back, just barely surviving the trip. That thought suddenly made Angel think of Demon again, and how it had always irritated her older sister that she was so untidy.

Angel laughed. If Demon could see her now, no doubt she would agree with her, saying in that bossy voice Demon always used when she tried to get her younger sister to tidy up after herself, "For God's sake, Angel, why can't you tidy up a bit, it looks like a tornado has hit this place!" It had annoyed the hell out of Angel whenever Demon got that way with her.

Again, Angel felt the sadness building up inside her, threatening to overwhelm her. She would give anything now to have Demon nag her, but that wasn't going to happen. She stared at her reflection in disgust. Demon probably wouldn't even recognize her in the state she was in now. Hell, she wouldn't recognize herself.

Angel frowned, she had to stop letting her mind wander like this. She was there to get her mind off such thoughts and to get herself some credits, so that she could eat tonight. She was just about to turn away, when another reflection stopped her cold. She stood there staring at the image of two people behind her, unable to believe what she was seeing. It couldn't be. It was just her mind conjuring up an illusion, playing a cruel trick on her. Angel made herself turn around, convincing herself that once she was facing them and not the reflection, the illusion would be gone.

But it wasn't an illusion. They were really there, no more than fifty feet away from her, walking hand in hand, laughing as they walked along the street. Demon and Gideon.

She felt a sudden rush of joy, and her first instinct was to run towards them, yelling out Demon's name, throwing herself into her sister's arms. But then her fear grabbed hold of her, stopping her from calling out, making her duck into the doorway of the shop where she could watch them, without the risk of one of them looking over in her direction and seeing her.

The moment she made herself known, Gideon would arrest her and her reunion with her sister would be short lived. Although Angel believed herself guilty of the crime for which Gideon wanted her, the thought of having her mind wiped terrified her. That fear alone had kept her from turning herself in to face her punishment, as once she had considered doing, until she fully understood what would happen to her if she were found guilty.

So Angel stood there, her heart racing as she watched them. The sight of Gideon was also having another effect on her, reminding her painfully of Lucas, frightening her with how much he looked like Lucas. For an instant her heart stopped beating, fear gripped her, her mind became irrational, suddenly believing that it wasn't Gideon with Demon, but Lucas and that he had succeeded in getting Demon as

he had planned. That he was here looking for Angel, here to exact his revenge on her for her betrayal.

She closed her eyes, [Stop it! It's not Lucas. Demon would NEVER be with him! She would die before giving in to him,] said a small voice of reason. Angel listened to it and opened her eyes. Of course it wasn't Lucas; she was being ridiculous. It was Gideon. Thinking more rationally now, she could see the differences that, however subtle, clearly showed who he was. Shaking her head, Angel focused back on the two as they worked their way towards the far end of the market. She started to panic; soon they would be out of sight, swallowed up in the crowd.

She couldn't lose sight of Demon, not after being able to see her again. Without hesitation, Angel moved out from her hiding place, and carefully began to follow them.

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Angel stood outside the small restaurant that Demon and Gideon had entered. She was able to hide in a small section beneath the second floor, where Demon and Gideon had taken a table on the outside balcony. From where she hid, she couldn't see them, but was able to hear them. And what she was hearing left her stunned.

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Demon laughed and swatted away Matthew's hand as it strayed under the table and worked its way up her thigh. "Matthew behave, you still haven't told me where we're getting married tomorrow."

Matthew gave her a wicked smile, again letting his hand trail its way along her leg. "It's a surprise."

Demon knew she had to stop him. His hand brushing her inner thigh was starting to cause a heat between her legs, and her entire body started to respond. She looked at him, to find him giving her a wolfish grin as he stared at her nipples, hardening beneath the tight fabric of her dress.

She cleared her throat and fixed Matthew with a warning frown, desperately trying to ignore the fact that his fingers had now reached the top of her thigh. "Do I have to remind you what happens when you don't listen to me?" Demon had to force herself not to laugh at how quickly he removed his hand, placing it over his other on the table.

Gideon shot her a wounded expression. "You're never going to let me forget that, are you?" This time Demon couldn't stop herself laughing as she remembered that day outside the castle with the fly bike, and the revenge she'd taken.

"Not if it keeps you in line." She said with a smile, then raised her hand to brush his hair back from his forehead. "You need a haircut."

Gideon shook his head. "Stop changing the subject. You know one day I'll find that data crystal."

Demon nodded and leaned forward far enough to let him look down her cleavage. "Whenever you'd like to conduct another strip search, Captain, just let me know." She quickly took his hand in hers to prevent him taking her up on her offer.

Matthew lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it gently. "Remind me again why I'm marrying you tomorrow?"

Demon was silent for a moment as if trying to come up with an answer to his question, then smiling said, "Could it have something to do with the shotguns my sisters had pointed at your head, when they told you that you'd knocked me up, and now you had to do the decent thing?"

Gideon laughed. "Could be. That, and the fact that I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you." For a moment, they were both silent, feeling the intensity of the moment. The appearance of a waiter broke the spell as he asked them if they were ready to order. They both recovered quickly and told the waiter what they wanted.

Demon watched him walk away then turned to Matthew smiling. "So where are we getting married then?"

He chuckled and leaned back in his chair. "You'll have to wait and see. And as you won't let me do what I want..." His voice trailed off, then he gave her a hungry look and leaned forward. "Be warned, as soon as we get back to the hotel, I'll be picking up where I left off."

Demon returned his hungry look, her voice low and husky as she replied softly, "Oh, I'm betting on it, Captain."

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Angel stood in shock as Demon and Gideon talked about their wedding arrangements. Her mind was in turmoil as she felt a myriad of emotions, varying from joy for her sister to a strange sadness mixed with jealousy. A jealousy that she fought down hard. She had no right to feel that way. It was jealousy and her wanting what her sister had that had been the first step to where she was now. She could hear and see how much they loved each other and in her heart she knew that they were meant for each other.

Angel shook her head, mentally trying to shake away the sadness. Demon sounded so happy, eventually succeeding in getting Gideon to tell her where the wedding was to be held. [Wedding...] Angel found her heart contracting on that word. But she stubbornly quashed her thoughts on why. Her sister was here to get married, and it was happening tomorrow.

She wanted desperately to be there, to share in their happiness. Angel chewed her lip. How could she go? She would be taking a great risk. If she were seen, it was a sure bet that Gideon would have her arrested on sight. For a moment, Angel felt a small hope that since she had left maybe things had changed, and she was no longer wanted for murder. Angel frowned; no, Gideon wasn't the type to just let something like that go, especially when she was guilty. Her presence there would cause a lot of unhappiness. Just her being there could disrupt the ceremony, and she wasn't about to let that happen.

She closed her eyes for a moment, opening them abruptly when she heard Demon mention Lily and Ilas. Her heart leapt into her throat. Lily and Ilas were also there. [Of course they would be at Demon's wedding.] The realization that all her sisters were there on Mars overpowered any doubts. She was going to that wedding.

Angel heard movement above her and realized that they were leaving. She waited, hidden, and watched as Gideon, with his arm around Demon's waist, led her into the street. Cutting across the market, they stopped briefly at a stall selling a variety of children's toys from several worlds. As Demon looked over the goods, Gideon leaned against the side of the cart, one leg crossed over the other at the ankle, his arms folded. Angel no longer saw Gideon. It was Lucas. Cold fear ran through her veins. The pain from her hands where she was digging her nails into the soft flesh of her palms, unaware that she

was drawing blood, snapped her back to reality and rational thought. She berated herself. [Stop it. That's not Lucas!]

She closed her eyes and took in a deep breath, calming herself. When she opened them, she looked up to find that Demon and Gideon had gone. For a moment, Angel panicked as she stepped forward, desperately searching the crowd for them, sighing with relief when she spotted them several meters away from the stall, clearly headed towards the section of Mars Dome where the higher-class hotels were located. She considered following, not wanting to lose sight of Demon so soon, but Gideon was a military man, she didn't doubt that with his training sooner or later he would sense that someone was tailing them and would turn around to see her. Besides that, the area where they were headed was less crowded than the market, and she would stand out.

As much as she hated it, she couldn't follow. She would see Demon and the others tomorrow. Angel moved from her hiding place and stood on the edge of the market, watching as Demon and Gideon steered their way through the crowd and disappeared.

She sighed and turning slowly, she began to make her way back to The Place of Lost Souls, having forgotten her initial reason for coming to the market as she continued thinking about Demon. As she entered the alley leading off the market, she stopped and looked down at herself in disgust. [I can't go to the wedding looking like this!] She turned around, deciding to try and find a hotel on the edge of the market where she could sneak in to get herself cleaned up, but she stopped suddenly as two thoughts hit her. Sneaking into an unoccupied room to wash herself and her clothes was extremely risky. If she were caught, she would be arrested and would never make it to the wedding. Second, it occurred to her that as bad as she looked, it could be a blessing in disguise. Looking like this, it was doubtful that her sisters or anyone else would recognize her.

Angel lifted a finger to her mouth and began chewing her nail, becoming aware for the first time of the cuts in her palms from her nails. The blood was now dry. She tentatively spat on her hands then wiped gently at the dried blood with her tunic. Once her hands were cleaned of the blood, she could see the deep nail marks. But they weren't bleeding any more, and apart from some uncomfortable stinging, they didn't hurt.

Ignoring her stinging hands, she thought about how she would get into the church. Gideon had told Demon where it was, and Angel knew it well. It was a Foundationist church with a beautiful chapel, not too far from the Place of Lost Souls. It sometimes had a soup kitchen, providing the homeless with at least one good meal a day. There was a small alcove at the back of the chapel, which was used as a place where people could light candles for those they had lost. There was a side door that opened right next to it from the street. She could use that entrance to sneak inside the church before anyone arrived and the ceremony started. And the alcove would provide her with a safe place to watch unseen.

For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, Angel smiled, feeling happier than she had in a long time. It was perfect. Tomorrow, she would head out early so that she could be at the church long before the wedding started.

Angel reached her section in the abandoned building and sat down on her bed. For the next several hours, she could do nothing but think about her sisters. Even when her stomach began to growl from hunger, she didn't notice. Tomorrow, she would see her family again, and she even let herself hope that they would have their babies with them. For a moment, Angel was saddened, because she wouldn't be able to make herself known to her sisters, but at least she would be there, not missing one of the happiest and most important days in Demon's life. She knew that she was being silly as she entertained the thought that maybe Demon might sense her and be happier for knowing that Angel

was present, but the thought made her happy so she didn't suppress it.

Angel stifled a yawn. Looking up, she could see that others had settled in for the night, most of them already asleep. Lying down, she covered herself with a blanket, wincing slightly as the rough fabric brushed against the cuts on her palms. Putting the discomfort out of her mind, she snuggled in under the blanket.

As she lay there with her eyes closed, and felt herself beginning to drift off towards sleep, Angel remembered that she hadn't eaten. She sighed, it wasn't the first time she'd gone to bed hungry, but it was the first time that she didn't care. She was happy, and she would think about getting food after the wedding.

Angel closed her eyes, and a smile played across her face as she drifted off to sleep thinking about seeing her sisters again.

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Gideon lay on his back, holding Deborah tightly against his side, her head resting on his shoulder, her arm across his chest, her breath hot against his skin. The contact reminded him that this was reality, this warmth, this softness, the feeling of her hair and her skin were all real. The nightmare wasn't real, this was.

It had been a bad night. He'd woken in the darkness, sitting bolt upright in bed, heart racing, pulse pounding in his throat, panting for breath, sweating, the sound of his own words, "Don't go!" echoing around the room. For a moment, the darkness of the room was the darkness of space where he hung alone, suffocating, knowing that he was going to die. Then he'd felt arms around him, the warmth of another body and soft words whispered in his ear.

"Never. I'll never go. It's all right, Matthew, it was a nightmare, it's not real."

Then Marcus had started to cry, woken by Gideon's shout. He'd felt Deborah's arms tighten around him, then she'd pushed him down onto his back and slid out of the bed, turning the bedside light on as she went. She was back in an instant and had laid the crying baby on his chest. His arm had come up automatically to hold Marcus against him as Deborah slid back into the bed and put her arms around them both.

Gideon had felt the fear and panic drain out of him as the warmth of the two bodies held tightly against him brought him back to reality. His heart had slowed and his breathing eased, the adrenaline slowly dissipating from his body as Deborah had projected calm, warmth and love at both him and Marcus. She'd kept sending until his pulse had steadied and Marcus had quieted, then gradually eased back.

They'd lain silently for a while, Deborah's arms still enclosing both him and Marcus in a loving embrace, until eventually Gideon had whispered, "Sorry," into her hair.

She'd kissed his shoulder and chest then looked up at him and smiled. "For what? We all have nightmares. You just have that same one over and over. What triggered it this time?"

He'd had the nightmare before when they'd slept together, and he'd explained about the attack on the Cerberus and how he'd hung in space alone, thinking he was going to die. "I don't know. Maybe being here on Mars again. This is where I joined the Cerberus; where I met most of the friends and crew who

died on her." He'd felt her squeeze her arms tighter around him, and again she'd projected her love and concern at him, letting him experience for himself the depth of her feelings for him. For the thousandth time, he'd wondered what he'd done to deserve her and the way she felt for him.

Marcus' cries had diminished to a pitiful whimpering, and Gideon had looked down and kissed the top of his son's head gently, then patted his back, trying to project the same sense of calm and love that he knew Deborah would be sending through her link to his son. They had no idea as yet whether Marcus had inherited his mother's empathic abilities but it did no harm to try.

Deborah had smiled up at him. "It's OK, he's just upset because he's wet. Let him go a minute and I'll change him."

Gideon had shaken his head. "No, I woke him, I'll do it." Holding his son against his chest he'd got up and taken the baby into the bathroom to change him then brought him back to his cot, giving him Half-Ted to hug as he drifted off to sleep. Gideon had stood looking down as his son sucked on the ear of his favorite toy, then across at the bed where Deborah had propped herself against the pillows to watch them both. He'd smiled at her, gone back to join her then pulled the covers back over them both and put his arms around her, hugging her close and kissing her.

"I may still get the nightmares but they're a lot easier to handle now that you and Marcus are around." Again, Gideon had felt Deborah project her love, filling the aching void of loneliness that always lingered at the fringes of his consciousness after the nightmare.

She'd kissed him passionately, then they'd made love, slowly, tenderly. He'd left the light on, so he could see her as well as touch her, needing the additional reassurance that this was real and the other was a dream, before he could sleep again.

Marcus had woken them early, and Gideon had watched as Deborah fed him, changed him, then put him back in his cot, before returning to his side. Now he lay holding her, feeling her warmth and softness as he contemplated the day ahead. He laughed softly and kissed her forehead.

"You know tradition has it that it's unlucky for the bride and groom to see each other before the wedding. God alone knows what fate we're tempting by doing this."

Gideon felt Deborah's laughter against his ribcage and heard her chuckle. "I don't care. There's no way that I was going to spend a night apart from you if I didn't have to. Anyway, what could go wrong? You've organized this wedding like a military operation. Everyone knows exactly where they're supposed to be and when they're supposed to be there, and they know that they'll get taken out and shot if they don't do the right thing at the right time." She looked up and grinned at him, then turned away quickly as they both heard a loud bang on the door and a split second later it flew open.

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"I thought there was going to be a wedding today? Well, it will never happen if you two plan to lie in bed all day. Up, UP! Times a wasting, the cock's crowed and the cows need milking."

Gideon laughed as Deborah flung herself out of bed, shouting, "Alwyn!" and launched herself into the old man's arms.

"I can tell that you took my comments to heart, Alwyn. At least you knocked this time." The Technomage grinned back at him, while hugging Deborah and kissing her forehead. Gideon frowned.



"Deborah, put some clothes on, will you? I may be old-fashioned, but I have to admit that seeing you naked in another man's arms doesn't exactly thrill me."

Deborah turned and stuck her tongue out at him. "Pooh. Alwyn has seen everything there is to see. There are bits of me that he's probably inspected more closely than even you have."

Gideon muttered, "I doubt it," and watched as Alwyn pushed her away from him.

"That was then, dear lady, this is now. And if you don't want to give an old man a heart attack, then do as the Captain says and put some clothes on. Although looking at you now, at least I'd die happy." Alwyn smiled at Deborah as she pulled on her robe and threw Gideon his.

He climbed out of bed and shrugged on the robe as Deborah said, "Come see Marcus. He's grown a lot since you last saw him." She led Alwyn to the cot just as another voice spoke from the doorway.

"I did try to stop him, Matt, but you know what Technomages are like."

"Sarah!" Gideon strode over and hugged the tall woman standing in the doorway. "When we didn't hear from you, we assumed that the invitation hadn't got through and you weren't coming. It's good to see you."

Gideon walked Sarah Chambers into the living room, leaving Deborah and Alwyn bending over Marcus' cot. "Have you eaten?" Chambers shook her head so Gideon called room service and ordered breakfast for four. Then he moved to the kitchenette off the living area and started making coffee as he watched Sarah sitting on the sofa. She looked tired, her face drawn and too thin. He knew how passionate Sarah was about her job and wondered if she was working too hard at the Treatment Center on Earth that she now ran. But it was interesting that Alwyn had brought her. Gideon had found out a few months before that the Technomage had feelings towards Sarah. He wondered whether Sarah knew about those feelings as yet. [None of your business, Matt. She's not on your crew any more. And since when has that stopped you being curious?] "So what happened? How come you didn't tell us you were coming?"

Taking two cups of coffee over and joining her on the sofa, Gideon listened as Sarah told him how erratic communications were on Earth. Her Center had been the target of a Cultist attack two weeks before, and all her attentions had been given to keeping the place running. She had only read the invitation to the wedding four days earlier, when it was too late to arrange cover, get decontaminated and get herself transported to Mars in time.

"I was planning on sending you a message saying that I was sorry, I couldn't make it, then two days ago Alwyn turned up out of the blue. He went through the Center like a whirlwind, giving orders as if he owned the place and the next thing I knew I'd been through full decontamination, and he was throwing me onto his ship. Only a Technomage could have got us here in time, and we landed in the early hours. I made him wait until a slightly more civilized time, but couldn't get him to make a more orthodox entrance. I have no idea how he knew where you were or what he did to the outer door to your rooms, but he just sort of waved at it and it slid open."

Gideon laughed. "You know Technomages. A law unto themselves."

Sarah smiled back at him. "Speaking of which, is Galen going to be here?"

The Captain shook his head. "I don't think so. We haven't heard from him for months and I have no

way of contacting him. When we invited Alwyn, I asked him to get a message to Galen telling him that he was welcome if he could join us, although I have to admit that's not entirely true. Deborah still hasn't forgiven him for helping Lucas escape and taking Angel away from her, and while I know that Galen had his reasons, I haven't entirely forgiven him myself." He looked seriously at Sarah. "He promised he'd never betray me again after that incident at the Well of Forever. Then he did. I can't forget that."

Sarah sighed softly. "I can understand that. If I ever got hold of Tracy Watson, I think I'd wring her neck for betraying me like that. And she was just one of my team, not a friend. Have you had any success in tracking Lucas?"

Gideon stared into his coffee cup. He felt a flash of guilt at the mention of Nurse Watson, which he quickly suppressed. She was an adult, who'd made her own choices. Bad ones. He was sorry that she was almost certainly dead, but in helping Lucas escape, she'd prevented him from keeping his promise to Dureena and put Deborah and Marcus in danger. Those were things he found hard to forgive. "None. They haven't even been able to find the shuttle he stole. Orion VII is a big planet with a population of a couple of million people spread pretty thinly around the surface. There's no sign of him or of Nurse Watson. I hate to say it, but I doubt very much if she's still alive, Sarah. He wouldn't have taken the risk of her giving him away." He looked up at Sarah with concern. He knew she felt some sense of responsibility for what had happened.

Chambers nodded. "I gave up hope of hearing that she'd been found safely some time ago. I still blame myself for having assigned her that duty. I should have kept women away from him completely, and she was more vulnerable than most." She looked over at him hopefully and asked, "And what about Angel? Any news of her, and the Brakiri who helped her escape?"

"We've drawn a blank there too. We had alerts out for a human woman traveling with a Brakiri, and we got one lead that brought us here to Mars, but it didn't get us anywhere. Even if it was them, they didn't stay long. The apartment they'd been staying in was vacated before we traced them, and there were no more sightings. They just disappeared."

The door buzzer interrupted them, and breakfast was delivered. Alwyn emerged from the bedroom holding Marcus in one arm while the other was around Deborah's waist. Gideon looked over at him and smiled. "Don't get too comfortable like that, Alwyn. That's my son and my wife you've got hold of there."

Alwyn snorted. "She's not your wife yet, you know, although I have just agreed to give her away, so sadly, I suppose she will be soon."

Gideon grinned. "You agreed? That's great. We had Max on standby for the job, but you know how Max hates to give *anything* away. I was expecting him to start bargaining with me at the altar. Can you imagine it? The minister saying, 'Who gives this woman in marriage?' and Max replies..." he dropped into a wicked impersonation of Max's voice, "Give? Who said anything about giving? Where's the profit in that?"

Sarah was lying on the sofa, laughing helplessly as Deborah walked to Gideon's side and kissed him. "That's very naughty, Matthew. Max has been extremely generous to us."

The four of them sat down to eat breakfast, Alwyn still holding Marcus as he ate with one hand. Gideon offered to take the baby, but Alwyn refused. "You'll get lots of chances to hold your son, I won't, and having been so intimately involved in his birth, I do feel rather possessive. So I'll take

custody of him until I'm needed for other duties. Now what are the arrangements for the day?"

As they finished breakfast, Gideon explained that he would shortly go up to join John and Luke in the large penthouse suite they were sharing with Lily and the twins. "Max wanted to put us up there too, but we didn't need that much space and Deborah doesn't like heights." He grinned at her, and she stuck her tongue out at him again. "I'll take Marcus and drop him off with Ilas and Dureena, who are acting as babysitters until the ceremony, when they, Luke and Max will bring all the children with them. Lily should be here any minute now, having dropped the twins off with Ilas. She and Deborah will get changed here while John has my dress uniform upstairs. He's my best man."

Deborah turned to Sarah. "You're very welcome to stay here until we leave for the church, or I know that Max, Dureena and Ilas would love to see you."

In the end, they decided that Alwyn and Sarah would leave with Gideon and take Marcus to the penthouse, where they would stay with Max, Ilas and Dureena. Sarah would stay to help them and Luke get the children to the church. Alwyn would come back down for Deborah and Lily when Gideon and John left.

Deborah went into the bedroom to prepare a bag of necessities for Marcus, while Gideon stayed with their guests, lingering over a last cup of coffee.

"I'm really glad that you two could make it. It means a lot to both of us to have you here. When we leave Mars in a few days, it could be years before we get back to home system again. It's good to see you before we go." Gideon raised his cup in salute, then left them to go back into the bedroom.

Deborah turned as he entered, closing the bag, then flowed into his arms. He kissed her then hugged her tightly. "This is turning out to be a pretty good day." He grinned. "And something tells me that it's going to get better." He let her go and grabbed clothes from the wardrobe, throwing them on as she sat on the bed, smiling as she watched him dress. "Don't worry, I'll shower and shave upstairs before I change. I won't embarrass you by stinking out the church."

He paused in front of the dressing table, looking down at his left hand. Slowly, he pulled the class ring off his finger and placed it on the surface, then turned as Deborah spoke. "You don't have to do that you know. It doesn't matter to me if you wear a wedding ring or not. You could still go on wearing your class ring."

Gideon smiled at her, saying, "It matters to me. If you're willing to wear one, so am I." He picked up his jacket, and as he pulled it on, Deborah stood and threw herself at him, burying her head in his shoulder. "Hey! What's that for?" He reached down and lifted her chin, startled to see that her eyes had filled with tears.

"Because I love you so much that sometimes it hurts." Gideon felt a wave of affection, love, passion and desire sweep over him as Deborah momentarily lost control of her emotions.

"Whoa! Keep a lid on it." He kissed her gently before continuing, "A couple of years ago, I talked to a man who was willing to be infected with the plague so that he could get to Earth and marry the woman he loved. He told me that he'd rather live with her for five years than live a hundred years without her. He asked me if I understood and I told him that maybe one day, if I were lucky enough, I would." Gideon lifted his hand to push back Deborah's hair from her face and ran his thumb along her cheekbone, then kissed her again. "Now I've been that lucky, and now I understand. I'll see you in church." He kissed her forehead and reluctantly let her go, returning to the living room where Lily had

arrived. He demanded that Alwyn hand over his son, then gave him the bag to carry instead.

Gideon carried Marcus out of the room, closely followed by Sarah and Alwyn, knowing that the day was going to get better and better.

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Angel reached the side door of the Foundationist Church. She paused, her eyes scanning around her, making sure that no one saw her as she reached for the door and pulled it open. Glancing nervously over her shoulder once more, she moved forward, carefully peering inside to make sure that there was no one there who would see her enter. Seeing the place to be deserted, she quietly and quickly slipped inside, closing the door silently behind her.

Angel paused as she took in the Church, its warmth and peace washing over her. She stood still for a moment, drinking in the beauty of the place, lit not by electric lights, but instead by hundreds of candles arranged on a variety of different candelabra that stood against the walls and lined the aisle, casting a soft, atmospheric and romantic glow throughout the Church.

The sound of a door closing somewhere at the back of the church caused Angel to jump. Fearing that someone was approaching, she ducked into the small alcove, pressing herself back behind a tall stand filled with unlit candles. She closed her eyes and held her breath as she heard soft footfalls making their way down the aisle. For a moment she felt panic welling inside, but she let out a sigh of relief and opened her eyes as whoever it was left the church through the large main doors.

Still shaking, Angel moved out from behind the stand to the front of the alcove. She looked out and smiled. She had a perfect view of the church. She turned around, noticing that none of the Memorial candles in the alcove were lit. Usually most of them were, but as if the Gods were aware of her need for cover, there were none alight today. This cast the alcove into near darkness, providing her with cover as she hid.

Angel knew that it was still early and it could be hours before the wedding took place, so she turned and walked back to the candle stand and lowered herself to the floor, sitting with her legs drawn up to her chest. As she sat there waiting, she thought about her sisters. Before the end of the day, she would be seeing them again. She wished desperately that she could make herself known to them, but she knew what that would mean. The last thing she would ever want to do on this day, was to cause her sisters any more pain, by upsetting the ceremony.

As she sat there thinking about her sisters, wondering and imagining what Demon would be wearing, Angel's stomach gave out a low growl. It was strange, despite not having eaten anything in over a day now, and despite the grumbling inside, she wasn't hungry. Angel gave a wry smile and decided that it was because she was so excited about seeing her sisters. She gave a soft snort. No doubt, once the excitement was over, she would feel raging hunger. [Oh well, I'll think about that later.]

Angel didn't know how long she'd been waiting, when she heard voices entering the Church. For a moment, she sat frozen in place. Then she recognized one of the voices. It was Lucas! [No, that's Gideon,] spoke the voice of reason reassuringly. She pushed herself up against the wall and stood up, a wave of sudden dizziness almost causing her to stumble against the stand. Desperately, she braced herself against the wall for support, for a moment, afraid that she might have made a sound loud enough to be heard. She stood fighting the dizziness as she waited to hear if Gideon and the other voice, which she now recognized as Lt. Matheson, had heard anything.

But clearly, she hadn't made any sound loud enough to be heard. She heard Matheson laugh at something the Captain had said as they made their way to the altar. For a few minutes, Angel didn't move, her legs felt like jelly and her head was still spinning slightly. Only after taking several slow, deep breaths did she feel steady enough to move out from behind the stand to where she could see the two men.

Angel gasped as she watched them standing at the altar. Both looking striking and she couldn't help but see why Lily was so crazy about the Lieutenant, but it was the Captain she couldn't take her eyes off. Dressed in what she could only guess to be his dress uniform, he was at that moment more handsome than she'd ever seen him before, and she couldn't help but feel a deep envy of her sister who would be marrying him today. She berated herself, annoyed with herself. It was these feelings that had been the start of all the bad things. Angel forced the envy away, instead letting herself feel only the things she should for her sister, joy and happiness.

As she stood there watching the two men, she couldn't help but smile as Gideon kept fidgeting with his uniform. He looked so nervous, yet at the same time indescribably happy. She wasn't able to hear what they were saying as the two whispered to each other, but she could see that Gideon kept looking towards the entrance. Angel knew that he was waiting for the same thing she was. Demon.

The sound of many voices arriving drew her attention away from the two men. When she saw who had arrived in the Church, she felt an almost overwhelming rush of emotions. She watched Ilas move down the aisle, cradling a small bundle in her arms. Angel couldn't see anything, but she knew that it must be Ilas' son. Beside her, walked Max and Dureena, who was also carrying a baby. For a moment, her stomach twisted with guilt for what she'd done to the small alien woman. Angel wished she could believe that the child Dureena was holding was by some miracle hers, and that they had been wrong about what she and Lucas had done. But she saw Luke walking beside Dureena carrying a third child, and something told her that the baby Dureena was carrying was one of Lily's twins.

Walking behind Luke was a tall, attractive woman she didn't recognize, carrying a fourth baby. Angel watched as the woman walked up to Gideon, who looked down proudly at the child and gently kissed the top of the baby's head, saying, "Hold onto him will you, Sarah? He's got my sense of timing, and if I take him now, he'll likely throw up all over me." The dark woman laughed, and Angel now knew that this was Demon's son. Her wish had come true. Not only was she getting to see her sisters again, although from a distance, she was also seeing their children.

Almost everyone was there, and Angel waited; there were only two people now who she needed to see for her happiness to be complete. She stood hidden in the darkness, watching the scene before her and waiting for Lily and Demon to arrive.

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Demon sat at the dressing table, looking at herself in the mirror as Lily stood behind her, appraising her critically.

"You'll do." Lily grinned, reaching out to tuck one errant curl of Demon's hair into place.

Demon narrowed her eyes and leaned closer to the mirror. "I don't know Lily. You know I never wear make-up. Doesn't it look a bit false?"

Lily sighed in exasperation. "For heaven's sake, Demon, all I've done is put some mascara and lipstick on you! You don't need anything more with your complexion, but this is a special occasion, you know.

You should make the effort for once." She stood with her hands on her hips, glaring into the reflection of her sister's eyes in the mirror.

Demon smiled. "I'm sorry. You've gone to a lot of trouble to make me look presentable for a change, and I'm being ungrateful." She turned on the low seat and hugged Lily. "Thank you. I suppose I ought to get dressed now."

She stood and again looked at her reflection in the mirror, giving it the same critical appraisal that Lily had given her face a moment before. She'd worked hard to regain her figure after Marcus had been born, and she now showed no signs that she'd ever been pregnant. [Except for those tiny stretch marks that Matthew loves to kiss.] She smiled as she looked at the faint white lines low on her abdomen. They were almost hidden by the white lace panties she wore. She smiled again as she imagined how short a time the panties would last after she and Matthew were alone together. The matching bra that she and Lily had bought during their shopping trip provided support for her breasts, creating a more emphatic cleavage than she normally displayed. But her dress would cover it and the thin padding inside the bra would absorb any leakage of milk she might have during the next few hours. Her long legs were encased in silk lace-top stockings so sheer as to be almost invisible. They added little to the color of her legs, but she knew how much Matthew would enjoy them and wore them for him.

She turned and took the dress that Lily was holding out to her. They'd visited many shops when they first arrived on Mars, finding nothing simple enough for Demon's taste that would suit Lily's idea of what was required for the occasion. They'd been close to an argument. when they'd finally come across a tiny Chinese tailor's shop and seen a cheongsam in the window, made of a rich cream silk that they both agreed would suit Demon's coloring. Lily had dragged her in and within moments, Demon had found herself being stripped and measured. The tailor had nothing in stock in her size but had promised he could make a dress up in a day. True to his word, he'd delivered the dress to the hotel the next day, and it fit perfectly.

Demon slipped the heavy silk dress over her head, careful not to disturb her hair, which Lily had so lovingly arranged, pinning it up with gold colored combs that they'd bought from a stall in the market place. She smoothed the rich fabric into place over her flat stomach and rounded hips, then did up the silk covered buttons that ran diagonally from the right sleeve up to the mandarin collar. Her arms were bare, and she wore no jewelry other than the gold and diamond ring that Matthew had given her. She slipped her feet into the low-heeled gold sandals they'd found on another market stall, after they'd almost despaired of finding shoes in her size. Demon smiled to herself again. [Always did have big feet.]

She turned sideways to the mirror, checking that the tops of the stockings didn't show below the slits in the sides, which ran up to mid-thigh level. The dress fit tightly over her breasts and torso, hugging her hips before falling straight to her ankles.

Lily stood back, frowning as she scrutinized every inch of Demon's body, which the close fitting silk dress displayed to advantage. Lily smiled. "You look stunning. You'll have every man in the place salivating when they see you."

Demon laughed, "Well, there's only one man I want slobbering over me, and I can think of two who won't even notice I'm there. You know that John and Luke never notice other women when you're in the room. I sometimes think I could walk in front of the pair of them stark naked, and they'd never see me if you were standing nearby wearing a sack."

Lily laughed and smoothed down her own dress. It was made of floor-length silk, and for once she

hadn't chosen green, but a warm yellow. In the front, the skirt was attached to the top in an upside down V following the line of her breasts, while at the back, it was gathered at the waist by a sash to flow down freely to her feet. In the back, a triangular transparent insert cut almost down to her waist, holding the two halves of the top together. The same material covered her shoulders, giving the impression of a shoulder-less dress while holding the sleeves in place. These were split from the middle of her upper arms to her elbows with the silk material falling loosely in front and behind her arms.

While the cleavage did reveal part of Lily's snake tattoo, it wasn't quite as revealing as it would usually have been--Demon and Matthew had chosen to get married in a church, after all. Besides her emerald ring, Lily wore a green velvet choker with green, yellow, orange and red beads hanging down in a V, with matching earrings. She'd gathered her hair up at the sides and tied it on top of her head with a yellow satin ribbon.

Lily smiled at Demon's comment. "Don't try it. I'd have to hurt them both if they did notice you." Her mischievous grin showed that she didn't mean it.

They both turned as they heard the outer door open, and Alwyn entered. He stopped dead in the living room, looking through the door of the bedroom at the two women standing inside. His chin dropped, and for a moment he stood with his mouth open. Demon walked up to him and lifted her hand to his chin, gently closing his mouth, then kissed him on the cheek. "You'll catch flies like that. If they have flies on Mars."

Alwyn smiled and spoke. "Just for a moment, I thought I saw an angel descended from heaven. Then I realized that it was you, Demon, the type of angel who comes equipped with a pitchfork. You look beautiful my dear. I suddenly find myself quite jealous of our good Captain. Perhaps I won't give you away after all. I'll keep you for myself."

Demon suppressed the shaft of pain that Alwyn's play on her name had caused. The reminder of her lost sister was almost more than she could bear, but she didn't want him to see how he'd hurt her. She forced herself to smile as she said, "Thank you kindly, sir," and executed a small curtsy.

Alwyn laughed out loud. "I thought that was a forgotten art, I haven't seen a woman do that in years."

She grinned. "I'm an old-fashioned girl. Older than you might think. Now you better tell Lily how beautiful she looks too, because today I'm entirely her creation. Left to myself, I'd have turned up in a nice comfortable pair of black pants." She watched as Alwyn hugged the tiny redhead and told her that today she outshone the sun. [Which she does,] thought Demon, watching them fondly.

She reached for the single, gold synthetic rose that lay on the table. It had been delivered after Gideon had left, with a note on his letter headed paper saying, 'If you're not wearing black, I might not know who you are. Carry this and it'll help me recognize you. I'd hate to marry the wrong woman.' She'd laughed aloud when she read it and vowed that she'd make him pay for that later. Now Demon lifted the rose to her face and inhaled the delicate scent. This was all she planned to carry. She turned to the others and said, "Shall we go?"

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Gideon stood at the altar of the Foundationist church, tugging down the jacket of his dress uniform. He hated this uniform even more than he'd hated the bellhop creation that Earthforce had foisted on him and his crew a couple of years earlier. He wished that they could have another accident in the

laundry and get rid of the dress uniforms too, but he knew that Earthforce would never believe it could happen again. They'd been skeptical enough the first time.

Matheson leaned towards him and whispered, "Stop fidgeting. You look as if you're waiting to be executed, not married."

Gideon grinned and whispered back, "It itches. Why do they have to make these things out of wool? They're hot, uncomfortable and all I ever want to do when I'm wearing one is scratch!"

Matheson grinned back. "Don't worry. I suspect that you won't keep it on for long after the ceremony."

Gideon snorted and was prevented from replying by the sound of the door at the back of the church opening. The soft music that had been playing in the background increased in volume, and he turned to see Lily entering. He heard a sharp intake of breath at his side and looked to see Matheson staring at Lily like a starving man seeing food for the first time in weeks. Gideon leaned across and whispered. "Down, Rover, down. Wait until later. It's traditional for the best man to seduce the bridesmaid." He had to admit that he'd never seen Lily look so beautiful, and that was saying something.

He glanced quickly at the others assembled in the small church, seeing Ilas holding her son, Vya, who had already grown to the same size as Marcus, despite being four months younger. Next to Ilas, Dureena sat with John's son, Dasha, who had fallen asleep in her arms. Dureena was looking down at the sleeping child, and for a moment, her grief at the loss of her own baby showed clearly in her face. Gideon silently promised himself that one day he'd catch up with those responsible for that loss. They would *not* go unpunished. Max sat on Ilas' other side, looking down proudly at his son.

On the other side of the church, Sarah Chambers sat holding Marcus on her lap, his back propped against her stomach, as he gazed around at the strange place he found himself in. Gideon mentally crossed his fingers that Marcus wouldn't start screaming for his mother when she arrived. Next to Sarah, Luke Raven held his daughter, Faylinn, who, like her brother Dasha, was fast asleep. Luke's expression showed that he, too, was completely entranced by Lily's appearance.

Gideon brought his attention back to the center of the church, and his heart stopped. Time slowed as he looked at Deborah standing in the doorway. He was barely aware that her arm was linked through Alwyn's who stood next to her in his most imposing black Technomage robes. He could only see her. The cream dress fitted like a second skin, outlining every delicious curve of her body. With her pale gold hair caught up by combs, leaving curls to tumble around her neck without concealing its elegance, and her face glowing with happiness that he could feel from where he stood, Deborah took his breath away. Literally.

As she walked towards him, Gideon began to feel dizzy. He swallowed hard and forced himself to breathe as she arrived next to him, holding the single rose he'd sent her that morning. He'd wanted to buy the whole shop, but had been appalled at the price he'd had to pay for just that one synthetic flower. After buying their wedding rings, he'd had only a few credits left, and the single rose had cleaned him out, but it had been worth every credit to see Deborah carrying it.

The next few moments passed in a complete blur. Gideon was vaguely aware of the minister speaking and hearing himself repeating words, but he had no idea what he said. All his attention was focused on the woman standing beside him, the way she looked, the way she smelled, the feel of her hand in his as he gently pushed the plain, gold ring on her finger, the feel of her hand on his as she did the same for him. All the time, he could feel small ripples of joy escaping her control and washing over him. He wondered whether the others present could feel Deborah's sendings and hoped that they could. In that



way, their friends could truly share in their happiness.

Finally, he was told that he could kiss her. Gideon pulled her into his arms, touching her lips gently with his, feeling her mouth open slowly under the pressure of his, barely touching his tongue to hers before pulling back and breaking the kiss. He was fighting to control himself, knowing that if he let himself kiss her in the way he really wanted to, they'd end up making love on the steps to the altar. Tempting though the idea might be, he didn't think the minister would approve.

Gideon looked into Deborah's face and saw her smile at him, her love and passion for him darkening her eyes, before a frown flickered across her forehead. Her attention was drawn away from him as she looked to the back of the church, the expression of puzzlement growing. Gideon followed the direction of her gaze and saw that she was looking towards a small, unlit alcove close to the door. He could see a figure standing there, barely lighter than the darkness behind it, and wondered for a moment who had gate crashed the ceremony. Then he heard the name Deborah whispered, her voice cracked with pain. "Angel?"

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## The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

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