

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

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Luke Raven's house on Deneb IV

Chapter 1

October 2269

Demon held the fire torch high to dispel the shadows that lurked in every corner of the cell. She lowered the carryall from her shoulder to the floor, as she looked across the dark room to the Box that lay on the shelf there. This was her goal, but she was still undecided as to what to do next.

She had left Matthew sleeping, gently pushing back the hair from his forehead to kiss him, then she had dressed quietly in the dawn light filtering through the doorway of her bedroom. Since the Excalibur had returned the previous evening, she and Matthew had spent every moment together, making love, talking, planning their future and that of their son, rejoicing in the knowledge that they would never have to part again. Matthew had helped Demon pack her few personal possessions, not that she had much that she needed. A few clothes for her and for Marcus, and some of the knives she kept in her hidden armory, nothing more. The rest of her baggage consisted of books, long since selected and packed in crates ready for the Excalibur's return.

But there was one other thing that Demon knew she may have to take with her, one thing she could not leave for the Brakiri. She had come to this cell twice before, once with Galen, when they had locked it behind them, never intending to return, and again after Lucas has taken Angel away, when she had come here to find the door wide open, just as Angel and Lucas had left it.

At that time, Demon had found the Apocalypse Box abandoned in the middle of the floor, the outer covering open, the inner contents glowing softly yellow-green. She had quickly closed the lid and placed the Box back on the shelf. Without the key that Galen still held, Demon had been unable to lock the cell, but she had brought Brakiri workmen back with her and they had fixed a bar across the door. It might keep the Box in, even if it wouldn't keep anyone determined out.

Demon was half surprised that Matthew had never asked after his Box, never inquired as to its fate. She wondered if perhaps he had wanted to obliterate all memory of what had happened to him, and of the consequences that his possession of that Box had brought for all of them. In the absence of any desire on Matthew's part to recover his belongings, and with Galen long gone, it was up to Demon to decide what to do next.

She walked across the cell and laid her hand gently on the outer covering, reaching out her senses to whatever remained inside the Box. Even with Lucas having escaped from his imprisonment there, Demon sensed that something still remained, something old, something sad and tired. It had no words for her, only feelings, and those feelings helped Demon to arrive at a decision.

She turned and tipped the contents of her bag into the center of the floor, then carefully arranged the wood and paper she had brought into a pile. Placing the Box on the middle of the pile, Demon took the container of oil and poured it over the Box and the surrounding material. Taking a long taper and a match, she stood well back as she lit the pyre she had made, and watched the kindling catch and start to burn fiercely. The flames turned yellow and green, as the outer covering caught and started to burn through. Demon stepped back through the cell door into the outer corridor, as the flames and heat grew in intensity.

A surge of white light burst from the center of the flames and hit the ceiling of the cell, seeming to pierce it. Then the Box silently exploded, showering the cell with flaming splinters, and throwing debris out of the doorway. Demon ducked away just in time to prevent herself being caught in the spray of burning wood, amazed that such an explosion could have been so completely soundless. She backed down the corridor and waited, as the glow reflected on the corridor wall opposite the door slowly faded.

After a few moments, Demon walked back towards the cell, proceeding slowly, always ready to duck back if necessary, until she stood in the doorway once more. She was half surprised that it had been so easy to destroy the Box. Everything Galen had told her about them indicated that they were nearly impossible to annihilate. Perhaps with Lucas' release the thing that remained, the thing that gave the Box its power, had decided that its time had come to an end. The pyre now burned low, and the only thing left was a cube of burning ash, which disintegrated in front of Demon's eyes. As the last remnants fell to dust, Demon felt one last emotion from whatever had inhabited the Box at the end.

Gratitude.

Demon pulled the cell door shut behind her and replaced the bar, then went back to her lover and the new life that awaited her.

Lily closed the door to the nursery and took a deep breath, then slowly took one last walk through her room. It wasn't really necessary. She'd made sure that she hadn't forgotten to pack anything she wanted to take with her earlier that day, but she wanted to say goodbye to the place she'd lived in for over six years. It looked strange with the tapestry and all other personal items gone.

Lily looked at the bare spot of wall, remembering the strange dream, [Or was it a sight?] which had led her to make the tapestry. She couldn't help but wonder whether the two wolves--the black and the white one--had been symbols for the two men who would enter her life years later. Just like the canines in her dream, they had appeared from somewhere out there, and had stood firmly by her side ever since--if not physically then certainly in spirit. A small smile played around her lips at the prospect of finally being able to be with them both. Right now, Luke was still at the infirmary making sure that Kirrin and her apprentices, Arrika and Brakar, knew where everything was, and to answer any questions they still might have. John was down at the shuttle landing site with Matthew, supervising the last transport of materials. They'd promised to come get the sisters as soon as the shuttle was away.

Lily quickly checked that Faylinn and Dasha were still sleeping in their baskets, smiling down at them, then walked back to where she'd just stood. She closed her eyes and concentrated as she took a few steps forward, walking through the hidden entrance to her workshop, which looked just as forlorn as her room. Her Grimoire and the other books had been packed into a separate box with everything else she needed to create magic. She'd spoken a special sealing and protecting spell over it to make sure that neither the contents nor the ones transporting the box would suffer any negative consequences. She couldn't help but think that the room looked... well, as if it were going to sleep. It didn't seem as cold and lifeless as Angel's room had, but she wondered if it would in a few weeks time. With a sigh, she stopped her musings; it was almost time to leave. [[Thank you,]] she sent to the workshop, and just when she crossed the threshold, she could have sworn she 'heard' a wordless acknowledgment.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, she opened a pouch on the outside of the bag that she'd filled with the most necessary baby equipment. She took out a picture and looked at it thoughtfully.

She'd always enjoyed roaming around the castle with its extensive corridors, rooms and cellars, and she'd gone on a solitary tour the day before, trying to memorize her home as much as possible. She'd weaved in and out of rooms, and when she'd been in a very small one on the top floor which was used for storage, she'd found a small crack in the wall that she'd never seen before. Kneeling down before it, she'd traced it with the tips of her fingers, causing the plaster to fall off in a layer of dust. The crack had grown bigger and turned a corner, until it revealed a small door of sorts, just high enough for her to go through on all fours.

Her curiosity piqued, she'd pried her fingernails into the crack and pulled, then pushed against it, but got no reaction. Finally, she'd closed her eyes and concentrated briefly, and when she'd looked at it again, it had been open. She'd ducked through the opening and had found herself in another small room, empty except for one knee-high carved wooden trunk, which stood in the middle, right in the shaft of light that shone through the single window. She'd knelt down in front of it, aware that her heartbeat had accelerated. Why would the Vorlon hide this trunk in here? What could possibly be inside?

Tentatively, she'd reached out and touched the lid, noticing that it was as meticulously clean as the rest of the room. The wood had been warm from the sunlight, but there had been something else, something that had probed her for a moment and then disappeared. The picture of the Apocalypse box had suddenly appeared in her mind, but she'd dismissed it. [This box doesn't feel menacing at all, quite

the contrary, in fact.] She'd taken a deep breath and carefully opened the lid.

A few items were lying in a heap on the bottom. On top was a doll of sorts, though she'd never seen one quite like it before. It was of roughly humanoid form, but without distinct features, and had seemed to shift ever so slightly as she'd held it in her hand, the material somehow stable and flexible at the same time. It made her think of Ilas.

After turning it in her hands for a while, she'd laid it back into the trunk and taken the next item, a book--a worn edition of *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. Lily had smiled, remembering the movie, wondering even more what this meant, then put it down again. Next she'd found a stuffed toy: a unicorn of all things. Lily had clamped down on the pain that had surged up inside her as it reminded her of Angel. She'd gently fingered the place where one eye was missing. It looked as if it had been in a child's possession for many years.

Then she'd looked at the last item laying on the bottom of the trunk, a photograph with the back facing her. She'd picked it up and turned it over. [Dear Goddess! This can't be true!] For several seconds, Lily had been paralyzed, because she'd immediately recognized the woman as her mother, from the sight she'd had during the birth of the twins. The man standing behind her mother with his arms around her had to be her father; he'd seemed vaguely familiar to her. Both smiled proudly, and cradled in her mother's arms lay a tiny red-haired baby.

Suddenly a drop of liquid had fallen on the photo, and Lily had realized that she was crying. She'd quickly dried the picture off with her sleeve, then wiped her cheeks. [This isn't possible! Why would the Others leave this here? They never cared for our feelings. or what we wanted. And yet... The doll must be Ilas', or at least from her species, and the book and unicorn must have something to do with Angel and Demon.] Suddenly her thoughts had ground to a halt, and she'd looked up, out of the window, eyes wide. [Or is this all just a product of our minds, like the rooms we grow? Is this where our unconscious wishes manifest themselves?] She'd turned the photograph round, looking for some sort of hint, but found nothing that gave her any clues. They would probably never know. [But my sisters need to know about this!]

Five minutes later, her sisters had knelt on either side of her in astonished silence. Finally, Ilas had reached inside the trunk and taken the doll out. Its surface had started to ripple as soon as she'd made contact with it, and suddenly she'd held in her hands a gold-skinned, red-eyed doll, a replica of her true form.

"What is this?" She'd whispered, "It seems to know who I am!" She'd looked up at her sisters wide-eyed, all her questions about her origins rekindled by this find.

Demon had reached inside and taken the book gingerly into her hands, as if afraid it would turn to dust. [[This... I had this book as a child. It's mine, it has to be, see the mark on the first page? I loved it because it was all about an orphan girl who goes off on an adventure.]] She'd swallowed and laid the book aside, then reached for the unicorn. [[And this was Angel's. Her mother gave it to her, and she never wanted to part with it. She still had it when the Vorlon abducted us.]]

Lily had seen the pain in Demon's eyes as she'd talked about her lost sister, fingering the stuffed toy, the one eye, the golden horn.

[[I guess this started her love of unicorns, this and her mother reading her fairytales about them.]]

Demon had sighed, then pushed the memories and emotions aside and looked at Lily and Ilas. [[But why and how did these things get here? And why would we find them now?]]

Neither of them had been able to come up with a satisfactory explanation. But they'd taken the mementos of their past with them, and as they'd shut the tiny door behind them, it had closed seamlessly, as if it had never been there.

Lily gently traced the picture of her mother and father with the tips of her fingers. [Will I ever find out who you were? Even if I never do, I will always love you and be grateful for what you gave me.] She sighed and put the photo back into the bag. No time anymore for musings about the past. A whole new future awaited them.

Lily, John and Luke arrived in the inner courtyard last, arm in arm, the men carrying their children in baskets while Lily had a bag slung over her shoulder. Ilas could see that her red-haired sister was just as agitated as she was. She rocked the sleeping Vya in her arms, more to calm herself than out of necessity. Lily gave her a shaky smile; for both of them this was the only home they remembered, so parting was even harder. But it wasn't easy for Demon either. She had her mask firmly in place and was leaning against Matthew, who held her tightly against his side.

Max gently squeezed Ilas' shoulder, smiling down at her encouragingly, and she smiled back bravely, at him and Dureena, who was very much looking forward to being on the move again.

The night before, they had held a big farewell party in the dining room, and not a single villager had been missing. They had received and given countless presents; it had become overwhelmingly clear just how close the witches and the Brakiri had grown in the years since their not-quite-perfect start. They'd told the Brakiri they were free to go in and out of the castle, or move in there if they wanted to. The Brakiri had in turn promised the sisters to take good care of the things they had to leave behind, and have their rooms ready for whenever they wanted to come back. They would also regularly be in contact through the comm. equipment in Demon's room.

Ilas was shaken from her thoughts as she heard Gideon say, "Let's go," and they did. At the main gate, the guards, cook, and other Brakiri working at the castle joined them. The group left the castle grounds in a silent procession. It wasn't long before they could see the villagers gathered near the shuttle. Ilas started crying even before they reached them.

For a moment, everybody just stood there, an embarrassed silence between the ones departing and the ones staying behind, but then Nikarran's daughter and her family crossed the gap to hug the sisters and wish them good luck, drawing a flood of handshakes, backslaps, hugs and kisses after them.

Lily had been on the verge of tears during the whole time, not helped by Ilas' crying, but when she stood in front of Kirrin and Thikira, she couldn't hold them back any longer. She threw herself into the Brakiri woman's arms, burying her head in her shoulder and sobbing loudly.

"Shhh... silly Earther, you go with your family, so why do you cry?" Kirrin said teasingly, but her voice was thick with emotion, betraying her feelings as she hugged Lily tightly. Then she gently pushed

the little redhead away and held her at arm's length. "We already told you how much we have appreciated your friendship and help, so I won't repeat any of that. Just don't forget us." She smiled at Lily through the tears shimmering in her eyes.

Lily sniffed and smiled back. "Never!" She reached up and took Kirrin's hands in hers, squeezing them in silent thanks for her friendship and help. Then she squatted down in front of Thikira, who looked at her with wide eyes full of tears. "I'll miss you and the other children so much!" Lily said as she reached out to stroke the girl's hair. "Remember to be good in school, and never stop learning."

Thikira nodded, then threw herself in Lily's arms. As if this was a signal, the other children ran up to Lily from every direction and hugged her, telling her how much they'd miss her, and that she should visit them, and that they would be very good, and how it just wouldn't be the same without her anymore. When she looked up, Lily could see that Demon was having a hard time keeping up her impassive face, the storm of emotions around her almost too much for her to bear.

[[We have to go,]] John gently sent to her, clearly moved. She gave him a mental nod and disentangled herself from the cluster of Brakiri children, reassuring them that she'd get in touch with them whenever she could, as she stood and fled into her two lovers' embrace.

Luke nodded at Kirrin with a warm smile. "Thank you for everything."

She smiled back and said, looking at him and John, "I know you'll make Lilith happy, that is thanks enough."

"Come on people, move it, we have a schedule to keep!" Gideon's voice called from the shuttle. He stood in front of it with Demon in his arm and Marcus in a basket in his other hand, hiding his own emotions behind his poker face.

Luke and John each took a basket with their children, who were looking out, wide-awake and listening to the myriad voices floating through the air. Lily tried hard to regain her composure as they walked towards the shuttle, joined by Dureena, Max and Ilas, who like her, was wiping tears from her eyes. When they stood in front of the ramp, she turned back to look over the assembled villagers one last time. She saw Kirrin draw a blessing gesture in the air and smiled at her, then quickly turned away drawing John and Luke up the ramp, not daring to look out again before the shuttle had lifted off.

Demon looked around the room at the boxes piled high in every corner and sighed. She was sure that there hadn't been this many when she'd packed, they must have been breeding in transit. Fortunately, Marcus was behaving for once and was fast asleep on her shoulder. She picked her way through the boxes into the bedroom and smiled as she saw the large double bed there. There was a small window over the bed, through which Demon could see Eriadne below.

She took a moment to look back at the planet that had been her home for the past six or so years and wondered when she would go back there again. The farewells to the villagers that morning had been sad and painful. Demon and her sisters had made real friends among the Brakiri, and they would be sorely missed. She remembered her last view of Kirrin, standing holding Thikira tightly to her, as the shuttle door closed, mother and daughter both weeping. But the friend Demon still missed most was Nikarran. He was often in her thoughts as she wondered where he had taken Angel and how they both were.

She shook those thoughts away and looked back out of the window. Matthew had promised that they could return on vacation, but Demon knew that Earthforce personnel took their vacations wherever they found themselves. They didn't detour half way across the galaxy for shore leave on one particular planet.

Demon looked around and saw that the cot she'd sent up on an earlier shuttle had been set up in the corner of the room, with the bedding piled inside. She placed Marcus carefully on the bed while she made up the cot, then gently transferred him to it. She left the bedroom quietly and prayed that he'd stay asleep for the next couple of hours, giving her time to unpack.

Returning to the living area, she chose a box at random and opened it. Books. Given that nearly all the boxes were packed with books, this was hardly surprising. Demon bent and started to unpack.

Gideon approached the quarters he'd had allocated to Deborah and Marcus with some trepidation. He'd promised to help Deborah unpack, then got tied up in a bureaucratic wrangle with Earthforce, which had taken far longer to resolve than it should have. He'd left Deborah in the landing bay five hours earlier and hadn't seen her since. The mood she'd be in by now, he'd be lucky if she didn't demand to be taken straight back to Eriadne.

Approaching the door, Gideon could see piles of boxes in the corridor outside. He lifted one and found that it was empty. [Well, she must have unpacked most of her stuff to make this big a pile.] He winced. If Deborah had finished without any help from him, there'd be hell to pay. Gideon keyed his commlink to call for someone to take the boxes away and paused, bracing himself. Then he smiled. What would his crew think if they realized that their intrepid Captain was standing outside the door to his partner's room, afraid to enter because she'd be angry with him? But when it came down to it, he'd rather face a full-blown Drakh attack than Deborah in one of her politely furious moods. He braced himself and hit the door signal.

The door slid open, and he walked into an immaculately tidy room, where every available shelf was filled with orderly ranks of books. It felt like walking into a library. Deborah was sitting on the sofa, dressed in a black shirt and black pants that cut off just below her knees. Her long legs and bare feet were tucked beneath her as she held a book in one hand, while holding Marcus to her breast with the other. She smiled up at Gideon as he entered the room and said, "Now that's what I call timing. An hour ago, I was spitting blood and ready to wring your neck, but I've calmed down and Marcus has been an angel, so you're going to get away with it this time." She put the book down on the table next to the sofa.

Gideon sat on the sofa next to her and kissed her cheek, putting his arm around her shoulders and hugging her gently. "I'm sorry. I would have gotten away more quickly if I could." He looked around the room. "Tell me, did you bring anything *other* than books? It looks like every box must have been full of them."

Deborah smiled. "Oh, it wasn't quite that bad. You helped me pack the one box that had Marcus' clothes and toys, and there was another with my clothes."

Gideon got up and walked to one of the storage cupboards that ran along the wall. A row of books ran the length of the top surface of the cupboard, and when he opened it he saw that there were more books inside. He started to laugh. "Is there any space in here that you haven't filled with books?"

She looked slightly sheepish. "Well, I couldn't really put them in the drawers, so that's where our clothes are."

Gideon looked more carefully at the books, and his laughter got louder. "You know you can take orderliness too far. You must have been a librarian in a previous life. Are they all in alphabetical order of author?"

She nodded and looked even more sheepish. "And alphabetical order of title within author." Deborah raised her voice to protest over his laughter. "But this way I know where everything is. Now do be quiet, Marcus is just about to go to sleep again, and you'll wake him up if you keep making all that noise."

Gideon came back to sit on the sofa next to her and hugged her again. Looking down, the Captain could see that the baby was still sucking gently at her nipple, but that he was half asleep already. He kissed Deborah's cheek again and spoke softly. "Well, when he's finished I want to take over just where he leaves off." Gideon slid his hand inside her open shirt to caress her other breast and gently rubbed his thumb over her nipple. He felt it harden under his touch and he heard Deborah's intake of breath. He started to kiss her neck, then moved his mouth to her ear, licking and sucking at the lobe, then taking it gently between his teeth.

Deborah's voice was low and husky when she whispered, "Give me a minute, he's asleep now." Gideon released her ear lobe and pulled his hand back as she got up and took the baby into the bedroom. Standing quickly, he pulled off his jacket and dropped it on the sofa. When Deborah came back, she flowed straight into his arms and raised her mouth to his. He held her tightly against him, allowing her to feel his erection, taking her mouth with his, parting her lips, then touching her tongue and her lips as he deepened the kiss, savoring the taste and textures of her mouth as he moved his hand back inside her shirt. Gideon could feel the moisture on Deborah's nipple where she still leaked milk and quickly dropped his head to her breast. Pulling her shirt open, he took her nipple in his mouth and began to suck gently. The taste of her milk aroused him further, and he heard her moan with pleasure as he licked and sucked.

He pushed the shirt off her shoulders without raising his head, then moved his hands to her waist, to undo the zipper on her pants and ease them down over her hips. They dropped to the floor, and she stepped out of them, kicking them to one side. Her hands were at his belt, undoing it and his pants, as he pushed her back toward the desk on the far side of the room. As the back of Deborah's legs hit the desk, Gideon moved his hand between them to part her thighs and stroke her labia. He moved his mouth to the other breast and sucked again, drawing the last drops of milk into his mouth. Deborah's hand was inside his pants, stroking and squeezing his cock, causing it to harden and swell even further.

Gideon slid a finger inside her and started to stroke the inner walls of her vagina, while his thumb found her clitoris and massaged it gently. Within seconds, Deborah was wet and thrusting her hips down onto his fingers. He used his free hand to push his pants down and to release his cock, now straining painfully against his briefs. Pulling his fingers out of her, Gideon bent and lifted her right leg over his arm, then shifted that arm to her waist, holding her leg up against her side and supporting her back. With his right hand, he spread the lips of her vagina wide and positioned his cock against her entrance.

Deborah's hands were now holding onto his shoulders for support as she leaned backwards, resting her buttocks on the edge of the desk, opening herself to him. Gideon could feel her nails digging into his shoulders through his T-shirt, as he pushed forward, the head of his cock sliding into her. She was

wet but tight, and he withdrew quickly, then thrust again and again, each thrust taking him deeper inside her. He felt her left leg come up around his waist, to pull him in even closer and he realized that he'd never taken her in quite this position before.

Gideon moved his mouth from her breast, then kissed and licked her neck and shoulders, then he looked up to watch her face as he increased the pace and force of his movements. Her head was thrown back, and Deborah was breathing hard, grunting softly every time he pushed into her. She opened her eyes, and he could see that they were completely black, the pupils dilated with her passion. The walls of her vagina started to pulse around him, and Gideon increased the pace again. He became aware that his own grunts of effort were matching hers, and that they were both now panting hard as they approached climax.

Gideon felt Deborah's vagina pulse around him as she came, half screaming his name as he continued to push into her, each time lifting her to a new level of pleasure. The waves of her orgasm rolled over him as she projected them outwards, forcing him to climax, each wave creating another release of wet heat inside her, until he was completely drained.

He moved his arm from her waist and carefully lowered her leg, moving his hand down her thigh to massage it gently, hoping that the unusual position hadn't caused her to cramp. Deborah lowered her other leg from around his waist and took her weight back on her feet, creating a wonderful movement of her internal muscles against Gideon's cock, still buried deep inside her. When he was sure that her leg was all right, he moved his arms under hers and around her shoulders, pulling her away from him slightly, so he could look at her face. Deborah was flushed and smiling, her eyes open and still black with passion as she looked at him, her tongue flicking out to wet her lips, dry from her panting as she came.

The sight of Deborah's wet lips and tongue were irresistible and Gideon leaned forward to take her mouth with his in a deep, satisfying kiss. When they finally broke for air he saw that she was still smiling at him. "What are you smiling at?"

Deborah chuckled softly and pulled herself tight against his chest again, burying her head in his shoulder. When she spoke her words were muffled. "I was just wondering how long it will be before we don't fuck like mad bunnies every time we're alone together."

Gideon started to laugh as he held her against him. "Oh, give it about fifty years, and I guess we'll only fuck like sane bunnies." Deborah lifted her head to kiss him again, and he could feel her tensing the muscles inside her, teasing his cock back into life. He pulled his head back to smile at her. "Now that could be a little optimistic, but by all means try. It certainly feels good."

He let go of her and leaned his upper body away from her, keeping his hips pressed against her, as he stripped his T-shirt over his head. The pulsing around his cock intensified, and Gideon looked back to see Deborah grinning at him, as she leaned back on her arms on the desk, still pushing her pelvis to his. He could see that her nipples were hard again and both leaked drops of milk after her orgasm. Gideon dropped his mouth first to one breast, then the other, to lick away the drops, then moved his hands to his pants that were still around his thighs and pushed them down, wondering how he could step out of them and kick off his boots while still keeping contact with her. Not that it would be necessary for much longer. The constant movement of her walls against his cock was arousing him by the second, and he was now half erect inside her.

It shouldn't have surprised him that his commlink went off at that moment. The only real surprise was that it hadn't done so a few minutes earlier, when it would have been *really* inconvenient. Gideon

raised his wristband to his mouth and answered the call. "Yes." He put his other hand to Deborah's lips, then moved it down to her hips, pulling her tight against him in an attempt to stop her moving. She grinned at him, but kept flexing her internal muscles, increasing his arousal by the second.

Matheson's voice emerged from the commlink. "Sorry to disturb you, Captain, but General DuChamps says that she needs to talk to you again about the new crew we've asked for. She says that it's not possible to get them all to Mars in time for the pick up, and that we'll have to change some of the requests. I told her that you'd gone off duty, but she was most insistent. She has to talk to you now."

Gideon closed his eyes and sighed. Deborah had managed to work him back up to the point where he was rock hard and raring to go. The thought of trying to renegotiate crew assignments with DuChamps when he had an erection the size of the Eiffel Tower didn't fill him with enthusiasm. "Tell her I'll call her back in fifteen minutes Lieutenant, and if you could hold off any other calls, and do your best not to crash the ship in that time, I'd very much appreciate it."

Matheson's chuckle was audible over the link. "Yes sir. So I'll tell her that you're engaged in something you can't break off, shall I?"

Deborah started to laugh but didn't stop the movements that were by now causing Gideon severe concentration problems. He placed his hand back over her mouth. "The only thing that's going to get broken around here is a certain Lieutenant's neck if he doesn't get off this line and give that message to General DuChamps," he growled into the commlink.

Matheson laughed out loud as he responded, "Yes sir. Fifteen minutes, sir. Are you sure you need that long?" signing off before Gideon could reply.

Deborah started to bite gently at Gideon's hand where it still covered her mouth, so he took it away quickly. Putting his hands on her shoulders, he pushed her back down onto the desk and lifted himself to lie on top of her. He felt her bring her legs up either side of him, allowing him to slip even deeper into her, then she wrapped her legs around his hips.

Gideon lifted his upper body away from her and looked down at her as she lay beneath him, still grinning. "So you think that was funny, do you?" He narrowed his eyes as he began to thrust into her.

Deborah's grin widened. "Yes."

He picked up the pace of his thrusts and smiled down at her, raising an eyebrow. "We'll see if you still think it's funny in fifteen minutes when I've come and gone, and you're still here, half way to an orgasm and left to finish by yourself."

Her eyes widened. "You wouldn't!"

Gideon's smile turned into a wicked grin. "Don't bet on it. You've got fourteen minutes, and I'm a punctual kind of guy."

Demon stood under the vibe shower trying to tell herself that it was having some effect, and that she would leave it clean. After three days of trying, she wasn't convinced. Of all the things she missed about Eriadne, hot water was top of the list. She now understood why Matthew had always wanted to spend so much time in her shower or in her tub. Memories of things they had done together there

came flooding back to her, hardening her nipples and creating a warm glow between her legs. She clamped down on the feelings firmly, not wanting to project her arousal. Her continued attempts to get clean were interrupted by a scream. She pushed the shower door back and ran through the bedroom, stopping in the doorway of the living room.

Matthew was lying on the sofa where she'd left him, with Marcus resting on his bare chest while he'd held a data pad above the baby's head, reading a report. Now the data pad was on the floor and Matthew's face was screwed up in pain. "Ow! Let go will you? That hurts!" He was looking down at Marcus, who had a handful of his father's chest hair firmly grasped in his fist and was pulling hard.

Gideon looked up pleadingly at Demon as she stood in the doorway. "Get him off me will you? He's going to pull it out by the roots in a minute!"

She moved to kneel by the side of the sofa, trying not to laugh. Taking the baby's hand, Demon gently pried the fingers open, hearing Matthew sigh with relief when the baby finally let go. She grinned at him as she lifted Marcus from his chest and said, "I may not like hairy chests, but it seems that Marcus does. Are you going to let me shave it or will you wear a t-shirt when you hold him in future?"

Gideon grinned back at her. "I'll wear a t-shirt. You get to shave me the same day that I get to shave you." His eyes wandered down her naked body to the V of curls between her legs. He raised his eyebrows and smiled wickedly.

Demon laughed as she stood and turned to take Marcus through to the bedroom. "You'll have to catch me first." She pulled one of Matthew's t-shirts from the wardrobe and turned to find him standing right behind her.

His arm went around her waist, pulling her close, careful not to crush the baby held against her shoulder. His other hand dropped between her legs, caressing her and playing with her curls. Matthew leaned forward to kiss her neck as he whispered, "Gotcha."

Demon dropped the t-shirt to the floor and raised her free hand to run her fingers through Matthew's hair, then clenched her fist and pulled back gently. His head lifted from her neck and she looked into his eyes. "Perhaps we should both keep all the hair we have and just try to discourage someone from tugging on it?" Matthew leaned over the baby's head to kiss her gently.

"Damned right. I hate to think what else he might decide to tug on. I'll make sure I wear pants when I'm around him until we cure him of that little habit."

She laughed and returned the kiss. "Now, will you put that t-shirt on and take him back? I want to finish my shower." Demon sighed, "For all the good it'll do. Matthew, how do you ever feel clean using those things?"

Gideon let her go and grabbed his t-shirt from the floor, pulling it on over his head as he spoke. "You don't. You just get used to feeling permanently dirty. It's psychological, or so they tell me. After you've used the vibe for ten minutes, you are officially clean. That's what the manual says, and good Earthforce officers don't question the manual."

Demon snorted her derision. "Well I'm not an Earthforce officer, and I don't care what the manual says, those things don't work properly. It's a good job that we have the basin, or God knows what Marcus would smell like by now. Talking of which..." She lifted the baby closer to her face and sniffed. "Here you go. Something for you to do while I'm finishing my shower."

Matthew groaned as he took the baby back from her. "I'm damned sure that somewhere in the Earthforce Officer's Manual there's a rule that says Captains don't change diapers. One of these days, I'll find it. And if there isn't a rule, I'll write one."

Demon watched as he took the baby over to the bed and laid him on his back, then turned to the drawer where they kept the diapers. She was grinning as she got back into the shower and turned it on.

"Do you need a hearing aid, Lieutenant?" Matthew Gideon leaned forward on the conference table, narrowing his eyes as he looked at his XO who sat opposite him, blinking after hearing his latest orders. They'd stayed behind after the staff meeting to go through the latest crew rosters, and somehow had ended up talking about Raven, not surprisingly considering what planet they were orbiting at that time.

Finally Matheson cleared his throat and said, "But with the new Engineering crew arriving, I should be here..."

"Lieutenant, do I have to make it a direct order? Maybe I should put it in writing in big letters down the length of the main corridor? Get off my ship and take your family down to that planet!"

"Yes Sir, understood Sir, thank you, Sir." John smiled and nodded his thanks as he got up and left.

Lily was looking curiously out of the front window of the shuttle as it descended to Deneb IV. She was sitting in the center seat with Faylinn in her arms, behind John, who was piloting the shuttle, and Luke, who held Dasha in the co-pilot's seat. They'd been delighted when John had brought the news that he could come along with them. Lily smiled and made a mental note to thank Matthew properly at the next suitable occasion.

As the shuttle descended through the atmosphere, she could make out more and more details, until they were flying along the outskirts of a large city, the planet's capital, as Luke explained, passing it by and steering towards a small town a short distance away--Tripoli. She studied Luke's face carefully, as it clearly expressed how much he was looking forward to the imminent reunion with his sister. Understandably enough, he was slightly nervous about the welcome his new family would get, and how Lily and Sara would get along. Lily didn't doubt that they'd hit it off fantastically, though. She'd talked to Sara briefly over the comm. unit when Luke had called ahead to announce their visit, and she was very much looking forward to finally meeting her 'sister-in-law' in person.

Luke turned around halfway in his seat and smiled at her, reaching his left hand up. She took it with her right and squeezed, smiling back.

Then John landed the shuttle in a clearing of the woods surrounding Tripoli.

Luke took a deep breath as the engines died and unstrapped himself. He couldn't help being nervous, although he knew it was stupid. [If Lily and Sara don't get on, then I must have woken up in a

parallel universe today!] He pushed the thoughts aside as they left the shuttle, instead concentrating on how much he was looking forward to finally seeing his little sister again. He took a few steps away from the ramp and took a deep breath of the fresh morning air. Dew was still shimmering on the grass, and the rising sun bathed everything in a warm light.

"Beautiful," Lily murmured, looking around, then told Faylinn in a soft voice, "See? This is where one of your daddies comes from," as she turned in a circle to show her daughter the surroundings.

John stepped around and took Faylinn from her after he'd put the baskets down, holding her out in front of him as he added, "And this is where Aboji landed to kidnap Daddy nine months ago." They'd agreed to avoid confusion that Luke would be called "Daddy", and John, "Aboji", which was the Korean equivalent. His family may not have lived in Korea or even spoken the language for generations, but he liked to keep in touch with his roots, even more since he'd been estranged from his family so young. While settling their daughter against his shoulder so she could look over it, he gave Luke an affectionate grin, which was returned in kind.

"And now you brought me back for a one day shore leave. Just so my family knows that I'm still alive."

"And well. Prospering, even."

Luke's grin grew. "Very much so. But let's go, shall we, before Sara chews me up for being late? She's not the patient kind."

Chuckling, they settled the twins in the baskets. John and Luke each took one, then joined hands with Lily, and Luke led the way to his former house and practice.

As soon as she could see her brother and his new family, Sara ran down the porch steps and along the path towards them.

"Luke," she called out, and threw herself into his arms as he met her halfway, having passed Dasha's basket on to Lily as soon as he'd spotted her.

"Sara," he whispered, "It's so good to see you again, little sister!" He was hugging her tightly, and she knew he was crying just as she was as they clung to each other for a long time.

Finally, she loosened her grip on him and pushed him back so she could look him up and down. After appraising his appearance, she said, "You look good! Being a father seems to agree with you," then grinned. "But your manners haven't improved. Don't you want to introduce me to your family?"

Luke laughed, and they both quickly wiped away the last tears of joy, before he led her to John and Lily, who'd been watching their reunion from a short distance, their children's baskets on the grass between them.

"Well, you already know John..."

"Yes, I do. Welcome back!" Sara smiled warmly at him, and he smiled back.

"Nice to be back. I never did thank you properly for your help in that conspiracy."

"Entirely my pleasure. I'd do anything to make my brother happy." She turned around, grinning up at Luke. "And I think he is."

Luke smiled and hugged her. "Yes I am, little sister. And this is the woman I owe it all to."

"Finally!" Sara exclaimed and smiled widely as Luke introduced her properly to Lily. "I've been looking forward to meeting you so much!"

"Same here. Luke told us a lot about you, so I was very curious."

Sara gave Luke a sideways glance and said in a stage whisper, "Only the good bits I hope?"

Lily laughed her rippling laughter. "Only the best ones."

Both Faylinn and Dasha giggled in their baskets and looked up at the stranger, who was only slightly taller than their mother.

"So these are Faylinn and Dasha, right?" She squatted down and ran her hand through Faylinn's silky red locks. "She's beautiful." Then she turned to Dasha, putting the index finger of her other hand to his, which reflexively opened to grab it. "What a heartthrob, just like his father!" She gave John a wink, then grinned conspiratorially at Lily as she saw his expression, torn between pride, amusement, and embarrassment.

Lily smiled and asked, "Do you want to hold them? They aren't heavy yet."

"Love to," Sara said and lifted her nephew out of the basket, smiling down at him. When he was settled in her left arm, John handed her Faylinn, and Luke helped her to get a secure, comfortable grip on them. Both studied her face, wide-eyed as she rocked them gently. "Hello, you two. I'm your Auntie Sara."

After a delicious lunch--a local roast that Sara had spent all morning preparing--they all sat in the living room of what had used to be Luke's apartment, above his practice in the house he and Sara had inherited from their parents. Sara was still living in her half of the apartment and had kept Luke's tidy during his absence. "Hey, my plants look healthier than when I left!" he'd said laughing.

Lily was feeding the twins, sitting on one side of the L-shaped sofa beside John, both listening to Luke and Sara who sat on the longer end, catching up and telling stories from their childhood.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the open living room door, and everybody looked up to see a tall, handsome man standing inside the door, a big grin on his face as he said, "So, where's the prodigal son then?"

Luke jumped up and reached him within seconds. "Steve!" He exclaimed as they embraced. "How are you? I barely turn my back on my sister, and you steal her away!"

Dr. Steve Roberts laughed as he and Luke walked over to the sofa, arms slung around each other's shoulders. "If you hadn't been so distracted, you'd have seen it coming." He smiled as he looked at Lily. "But I can understand why your mind was elsewhere, and didn't want to leave."

"And I never will again," Luke answered, then proceeded to introduce his friend to Lily and John.

Lily gave Sara an approving smile as Roberts sat down between her and Luke, kissing her on the cheek briefly. He surely didn't fit any cliché picture people might have of doctors. With his dark skin, short-cropped black curls and beard, and his choice of black pants and a shimmering blue-green satin vest over a white shirt with flaring sleeves, he looked rather fetching. But it wasn't only his looks, he struck her as an open and warm person. His genuine, charming smile and the twinkle in his eyes suggested a humorous character.

This impression was confirmed after a short while. They were all holding their bellies with laughter as Steve and Luke told stories about their time in med. school, and what mischief they'd managed to get up to. The most hilarious tale was the one of how they'd 'borrowed' the med. school skeleton and hung it outside the front door of Mr. Moons' house, a teacher all the students hated. What had caused the biggest laugh was that they'd used a necktie that looked exactly like the one he always used to wear to hang the skeleton. He'd reportedly fainted when he'd opened his door in the morning and walked straight into the skeleton's arms.

"Luke, I am shocked. I'd never have thought you'd do such naughty things!" Lily managed to say, a mock exasperated expression on her face, after the latest fit of laughter. Faylinn and Dasha now lay in their baskets, which stood on the sofa beside her, sleeping despite the noise.

"Hey, it's his fault," Luke said with an innocent expression, indicating Steve. "He forced me to go along with him!"

Roberts elbowed his friend and laughed, then grinned at Lily. "You should have seen the mischievous twinkle in his eyes when I told him about my plan. I thought I'd have to hold him back!" The grin spread further as he added, "Of course no one ever suspected we two were involved, because we were such good and correct students! And our innocent act was so convincing that Moons must still be wondering who the culprits were!"

Time flew by too fast, and soon the small group stood outside the shuttle, making their good-byes. Roberts drew Raven into a bear hug, then held him at arm's length and said, "Take good care of yourself and your charming family, Luke. I promise I'll do the same for your sister."

Luke smiled at his friend, clearly moved. "I know. And I wish you all the best." Then he turned to his sister, who was already close to tears. Before he could say anything, she threw her arms around him, leaning into his embrace and burying her head in his chest as she sobbed. Luke hugged her tightly and drew a shaky breath. "Stop that, Sara. You know what tears do to me."

Sara sniffled a few times and made an effort to pull herself together, then leaned back, looking up at him. "I'll miss you big brother," she whispered.

He smiled at her sadly, wiping the tears from her face. "I'll miss you too little sister. I... I'll try to keep in touch." There were so many things he wanted to say to her... instead he leaned down and kissed her cheek, hugging her tightly one last time, then quickly he let go of her and turned to walk up the ramp, not once looking back before he disappeared inside the shuttle.

"He never could stand good-byes," Roberts murmured as he looked after his friend, then sighed and turned to Lily and John. "Well it was a real pleasure to meet you. I hope it won't be too long until your next visit." He took Lily's hand and bowed slightly to place a feather-like kiss on its back, making her grin despite the sad moment, then nodded at John as he let go. "Lieutenant, I wish you a successful mission."

Lily didn't hear John's reply as she stood in front of Sara, looking at her, struggling for words to soothe her pain. Suddenly, instinctively, she drew the other woman into a tight embrace, whispering, "We'll take good care of him, don't you worry. We love him."

Sara smiled bravely at her as she drew back, taking her hands and squeezing them tightly. "I know. Knowing that he'll be loved and taken good care of makes letting him go that much easier." She nodded at Lily and John, who'd moved to stand behind his partner.

"You can be sure of that," John said earnestly, returning the nod.

Luke was still standing, leaning his head against the shuttle's wall, when he heard John and Lily enter, and the door close. A moment later, he felt two pairs of arms move around his ribcage, turning him around and enfolding him in a tight embrace, then the familiar sensation of sharing minds. No words, only their love flowed into him, and he drew his lovers even closer, thanking them silently. Finally he took a deep breath, withdrawing from their embrace, and smiled gratefully.

When they'd settled in their seats, John lifted the shuttle off and turned in a tight circle above the clearing, at the edge of which Sara and Steve were still standing, waving up to them. Luke waved back, then they were gone, and the shuttle rose into the sky. He briefly closed his eyes as the pain of separation threatened to surge up again, then his attention was drawn to Faylinn, who'd started babbling in his arms. He looked down at her, once more overwhelmed at how much love such tiny beings could call forth, and lifted her to kiss her forehead. [No regrets. None at all.]

Gideon lay on his back in the large double bed he'd had fitted into Deborah's bedroom, grinning as he listened to her cursing in the vibe shower. Marcus had woken them early, wanting to be fed, after which Deborah had gone into the bathroom. Gideon didn't need to be on the bridge for another hour, so he lay back enjoying what was becoming the daily ritual of her abuse of the shower. What amused him most was her ability to think up new ways of vilifying the equipment. Her vocabulary was awesome. He'd even had to look up some of the words she'd used.

When Deborah finally emerged, she stood naked in the doorway, legs apart, hands on hips, glowering at him. He spoke before she could. "I've been thinking..."

Deborah interrupted before he could finish. "Don't do it too often. You'll hurt something."

Gideon leaned across and picked Half-Ted up from the bedside table and threw it at her. She caught the teddy bear neatly and moved to put it into the cot with the sleeping baby. "Well, now I know where Marcus gets the habit of throwing his toys around." Deborah moved back to the bed and slid in next to him, kissing his forehead as she did so. "So what have you been straining the little gray cells over?"

He grabbed her and rolled her onto her back, kissing her thoroughly before pushing himself up onto one arm and looking down at her. "About your clothes."

Deborah raised her eyebrows as she looked up at him. "My clothes? What about them? They won't fit you if that's what you're thinking. Too tight in the shoulders and baggy in the ass."

He put his hand over her mouth. "Just shut-up a minute will you? I was thinking about the color of your clothes. They're all black, and yes, I know how observant that makes me. Captains have to be observant." Gideon could feel Deborah smiling under his hand, and then she started to bite at his fingers so he pulled his hand away quickly.

She pulled his hand back and started to kiss and suck at his fingers, taking his thumb deep into her mouth and running her tongue around it. Gideon felt himself responding to her and hurried on before she could distract him completely.

"Now don't get me wrong, I love your clothes. Well, actually I love you out of them more than in them, but black is good." Deborah's attentions to his hand were beginning to cause him difficulty in concentrating. "I just wondered what you planned to wear to the wedding."

She stopped sucking at his thumb and pulled it from her mouth, frowning as she did so. "I haven't really thought about it."

Gideon started to laugh. "You must be the only woman in the galaxy who wouldn't think about what to wear to her own wedding."

Deborah smiled up at him. "What do you want me to wear?"

He ran his hand down over her naked breasts and stomach, before sliding it between her legs. "Just something that's not black, OK?"

She grinned as she spoke. "OK, whatever it is, I promise it won't be black."

Gideon lifted himself over her until he was poised above her, his weight resting on his arms placed either side of her body. "After listening to all that cursing in the shower, I have to wonder how fresh you are. I think I'd better carry out an inspection to make sure you got to all those little places that are so difficult to vibe clean."

She lifted her arms and rested them around his shoulders. "And what happens if I fail inspection, Captain?"

"Then I'll have to think of a suitable punishment duty for you. Can't have dirty women on my nice clean ship."

Deborah's eyes were sparkling as she murmured, "I thought that was how you liked your women," then pulled Gideon down into a long, passionate kiss.

Demon stood behind Gideon's chair, watching the viewer carefully. He'd called her and Lily and asked them if they wanted to watch as they emerged from hyperspace into the Home system. Demon had moved so fast that Matthew had laughed as she arrived on the bridge, asking if she'd added

teleportation to her talents. She grinned down at him as he sat in his command chair, resisting the temptation to swat his arm for teasing her. She was very much aware that as Captain he needed to maintain a level of discipline, and that she should ensure that she never undermined his authority by over-familiarity in public. But it was hard. All she really wanted to do was snuggle into his lap and kiss him. [Control yourself woman. Ravishing the Captain on his bridge is probably a hanging offense.]

So Demon stood behind the Captain's chair, exercising all her control to keep her hands on the back of the chair rather than on the back of Matthew's neck, watching the view screen where the red of hyperspace showed. Lily arrived on the bridge, having arranged for Dureena to baby-sit her twins and Marcus. She sidled up next to Matheson, and Demon could see that Lily was finding it equally hard to keep her hands to herself. After a whispered exchange of words, Lily came to stand next to Demon.

Lily turned to Demon and asked, "Have I missed anything?"

Before Demon could respond, Matthew turned in his chair and spoke. "No, you got here just in time. We're approaching the Mars beacon and John will tell me when we've arrived. Then we jump back to normal space, and if Helm has it right..." he pointed to one of the stations in front of the bridge. Demon watched as the woman at that station straightened in her seat, "we should see Mars right in front of us when we emerge." He turned and faced the front, watching Matheson, who held his headset against his ear, obviously listening closely to whatever he could hear on it.

Matheson turned to Gideon and said, "Ready to jump, Captain."

Gideon nodded. "Jump." He stood and walked over to stand next to Matheson.

Demon dragged her eyes away from the Captain's butt and watched as a hole appeared in the wall of red on the view screen. Initially filled with a swirl of colors, it quickly turned black and expanded to show a red planet in its center. The Excalibur surged forward and shot through the hole, dropping into normal space with Mars directly in front of them.

Gideon turned to Matheson. "Excellent job, Lieutenant. Perfect position." He turned to another station. "Contact Mars Space Traffic Control and give them our ETA." As he gave the order, Demon could hear Matheson instructing Helm to take them into orbit around Mars. She could see that the bridge crew worked closely together, each person with his or her own responsibilities making sure that everything ran smoothly.

Matthew turned back to Demon and Lily and smiled. "There it is, ladies, Mars. We'll be arriving in orbit in about two hours, then we can take the shuttles down as soon as we get landing slots. It's a busy spaceport, so that may take a while but we should be planet side soon." He stood close to Demon and lowered his voice so that only she could hear him. "Max has booked three suites in one of Mars Dome's top hotels. Says it's a wedding present for us. Surprised the hell out of me. I'll take you and Marcus there as soon as we get down, but then I'll have to get back to work. I'll join you as soon as I can get free, is that OK?" Demon smiled and nodded, controlling the urge to kiss him. [Groping the Captain on his bridge would probably get me flogged and keelhauled.]

Demon turned back to the view screen, now filled with an image of the planet below and asked, "Where's Earth? Can we see it from here?"

Gideon turned back to the front of the bridge and gave instructions to change the view and magnify. The image shifted, and a small blue marble appeared in the center of the screen. He smiled at Demon.

"That's about as big as we can make it from here. There she is. Earth."

Demon took a deep breath as the reality of her situation finally dawned on her. She was in space, orbiting Mars, looking back at the planet where she had grown up and expected to spend her whole life. She found it hard to speak past the lump in her throat evoked by the image, but forced herself to whisper, "Can we visit Earth one day, Matthew? Is it safe?"

He shook his head. "Not yet. They managed to manufacture enough of the virus screen that Alwyn and Sarah created to seed the atmosphere, so anyone going to Earth won't catch the plague. But it's taking time to treat all the people already infected. Each one has to be treated individually, and with a population of ten billion that takes time. They're prioritizing the sick and the young, but people are still dying and there's still a lot of unrest. Some of the Apocalyptic cults that sprang up are trying to sabotage the treatment centers, which doesn't help. It'll be a while yet before anyone other than essential personnel can visit Earth." Gideon smiled at her sadly. "But I'll take you home one day, I promise."

Demon swallowed hard. "I can't go home, Matthew. My home disappeared a long time ago. All we can do is visit the place where my home used to be, the place where I grew up and where Angel and I used to live." She gazed at him longingly. "But now my home is wherever you and Marcus are."

Gideon took a deep breath and pulled her close to him. Whispering, "To hell with discipline," he kissed her.

When the image of Earth appeared on the viewscreen, Lily took an involuntary step forward. She was unable to tear her eyes off that little blue ball that held all the secrets of her past. She shivered as pictures flooded in on her, the few memories she still had access to. She had to suppress an urge to reach out with her hand to try and touch the image. The screen was too far away for her to reach anyway. She barely registered Demon and Gideon talking.

[[Are you OK?]] A voice suddenly pierced her thoughts.

Lily blinked and looked up, surprised to find herself standing at the front of the bridge, next to John, who was looking at her with concern in his eyes. [[Yes, I ... I don't know. I think so. This is just so overwhelming...]]

John smiled his understanding at her, and while he couldn't enfold her in his arms, she felt his mental caress.

[[Thank you.]]

From the corner of her eye, she saw Gideon kiss Demon, and lifted an eyebrow. "Well in that case..." she muttered and grabbed John's neck, pulling him down into a short but deep kiss.

Demon and Gideon chuckled, and the other crew members on the bridge were trying to suppress their grins as John blushed slightly, looking at Lily with a mixture of amusement and exasperation, and the promise to get back at her later in his eyes. She smiled innocently.

"Now Lieutenant, I expect you to do as I say, not as I do," Gideon said, grinning widely.

John turned to face him and said apologetically, "Sorry Sir, force majeure," causing more chuckles and

grins all over the bridge.

Lily gave Gideon and her sister a wicked grin.

Demon looked around the suite that she and Matthew were to share in the Mars Dome hotel. It was luxurious by Mars' standards, but seemed small and bare by comparison to her rooms on Eriadne. Matthew had told her that the room must have cost Max a fortune, as it had a real water shower and tub. Water was nearly as scarce a commodity on Mars as it was on the Excalibur. He'd also told her that he'd had qualms about accepting such a generous gift from Max, but had eventually decided that it was being paid for by the bonuses Max had earned from the technology they'd found on Eriadne, so she and Marcus deserved it.

The suite was similar in size to her quarters on the Excalibur, although the bathroom was bigger and the living room had a window that looked out onto the main concourse of Mars Dome. Demon held Marcus against her shoulder as she looked out on the crowds scurrying below. She smiled as she remembered Matthew telling the hotel receptionist that they needed a suite on a lower floor. He was never going to forget that she didn't like heights.

Mars seemed an incredibly crowded and busy place, and she'd had to work at not showing her discomfort when Matthew had brought her and Marcus to the hotel. She didn't want him to see how anxious the press of people had made her, she knew that she'd get used to it in time, she was just out of practice with crowds. Being surrounded by people, all feeling different emotions, had been confusing and difficult. Demon promised herself that she would continue her lessons from John, in which he was teaching her how to block. It had been a relief when they arrived in their suite and found that Max had arranged for flowers, fruit and champagne to be delivered. Matthew had hugged her and told her that they'd share it when he got back, but he had to go to Earthforce Mars HQ to sort out crew assignments and would be back later.

Demon sighed and rocked Marcus gently. She'd just fed him, and he was ready to sleep. She just hoped he'd settle in the cot that had been set up in a corner of the bedroom. He clutched his beloved Half-Ted tightly in his hand, sucking on an ear as he always did as he fell asleep. Demon smiled and wondered how long it would be before the ear disintegrated, and they faced a major crisis. She decided that while they were on Mars, she'd look out for another toy for him, something to distract him from Half-Ted.

Matthew had promised her that after tomorrow, he'd be on leave and would take her to see the sights of Mars Dome. So tomorrow she and Lily planned first to sell some books to get credits, (Max had a contact who could help) and then to shop for a dress for her to get married in, while Ilas and Dureena baby-sat. The day after she would go sightseeing with Matthew, then the day after that... Demon's breath caught in her throat. That was the day she and Matthew were getting married. He wouldn't tell her where, saying it was going to be a surprise but she planned to work on that over the next couple of days.

Marcus had fallen asleep against her shoulder so she walked into the bedroom and laid him gently in the cot, Half-Ted beside him. She moved back to the living area and fiddled with the entertainment unit for a while before finding a channel that showed old 2D movies. Demon settled down into the sofa and sighed. Life was good, she had a son she loved, she was about to marry a man she adored and the future was full of new places and exciting events; there was only one thing missing. Her heart still ached with grief for her lost sister. Every day, she thought of Angel and wondered where she was and how she was living. She knew that Nikarran would be taking good care of Angel, keeping her safe and

well, but Demon still longed for the day when they could be together again. A tear escaped her and rolled down her cheek as she wondered where Angel was and how that could ever be.

{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](#)}