

# The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 3: Twists and Turns

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Max' old 'friend', Magnusson

## Chapter 2

Lily silently slipped out of bed and crossed to the large window looking out over the main concourse of Mars Dome. She'd been awake for a while, and had heard Demon leave for the Security Station. She and Ilas would have loved to go with her, but they understood that Demon wanted to spend some time alone with her half-sister first.

Shifting her weight forward, she leaned her forehead and the palms of her hands against the glass--or whatever material these windows were made of. She hadn't slept well, but it wasn't just because of the excitement about Angel's reappearance, her subsequent arrest and Demon's estrangement from Matthew. She could feel a foreboding, like something dark brewing in the mists concealing the future. She closed her eyes and relaxed, trying to trace that strange feeling back to its origins. For several seconds, she stood there unmoving, then suddenly felt a wave of fear, betrayal, anger, pain and anguish surge up from out of nowhere--emotions so strong that they overwhelmed her.

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Luke had woken up when Lily sneaked out of bed, but he'd chosen to remain silent, watching her as she stood against the window. Her mass of red curls hung down to her buttocks like a veil, covering most of her naked body. [If it continues to grow at that rate, it will probably be floor-length in two years, max.] He silently sat up in bed, swinging his left leg out, his eyes resting on her still figure,

wondering what she was thinking.

Suddenly, her whole body went rigid, and at the same moment, John sat bolt upright in bed, gasping, eyes wide, and the twins started wailing in their cots.

Luke was out of bed a split-second before John when they saw Lily slide slowly down the window. While John rushed to soothe the twins, Luke ran to her and managed to catch her from behind before she hit the floor. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed, laying her down gently. As he sat beside her, he brushed a few errant locks back from her face and saw her eyes moving behind closed lids and heard a small whimper escape her throat.

John sat down on the other side of the bed, sending love and reassurance to Faylinn and Dasha, who were still crying in his arms. He watched anxiously as Luke softly stroked Lily's cheek. "Lily? Can you hear me?"

After a moment, her eyelids fluttered open, and she stared up at him, obviously disoriented. "What... what happened?" she whispered, after wetting her dry lips with her tongue.

"You were standing at the window when suddenly your body went rigid, and then you fainted."

Lily frowned, trying to get her head clear.

"I got an outburst of emotions from you, Lily... and our children too..." John shuddered as he remembered the storm of emotions that had awoken him.

Lily looked at him, finally aware enough to notice the children's discomfort and their whimpering. She held out her hands, and John laid them into her arms. "Shh... it's all right. No one's going to hurt you, my darlings." She kissed their soft hair, sending calm and love through their link, then looked up at John. "I think... I broadcast."

"What do you mean, you broadcast?"

Lily took a deep breath. "It was a transmission from the future. I had a sight. About the trial."

John and Luke exchanged worried glances, then Luke asked softly, "What did you see?"

"I didn't really see anything. It was just a... well, an outburst of feelings--pain, fear, anger, betrayal... and I *knew* it had to do with the trial." She looked up at Luke, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "Something bad will happen. I think these feelings came from Angel!"

Luke blinked. During Lily's pregnancy, that ability of hers seemed to have been suppressed, like Demon's empathy, but since Demon's abilities had returned, it was only logical to assume Lily could have sights again. And her earlier ones had all proven true. He still felt a stab of pain as he remembered one in particular, and how close they had been to losing John after Lucas, in Gideon's body, had shot him with a PPG. [We can't take this lightly.] He softly stroked her hair and asked, "That's all you remember?"

Lily frowned in concentration for several seconds, then said, "I somehow felt it wasn't connected to Matthew's charges. But otherwise, that's all I got." She sighed, then looked from Luke to John. "We may not know what, but we are warned that *something* will happen, so we just have to be alert and ready. And not a word to Demon! She has enough to worry about already."

John and Luke nodded.

Lily couldn't help but smile softly as she looked down at Faylinn and Dasha, who were sleeping soundly in her arms now. "I guess we'd better get back to sleep too, so we'll be fit for whatever is awaiting us."

Half an hour later, all five of them were asleep in the big bed.

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Gideon was still trying to get over the sheer physical impact the lawyer made on his surroundings. Easily two meters tall, he actually managed to look stocky in build, he was so wide, and as far as Gideon could tell, he didn't have an ounce of fat on him. Gideon's right hand was still numb from the bone-crushing handshake he'd received on entering the office. And what an office it was. It seemed about the same size as the Excalibur's gymnasium and had a huge picture window looking out over the Mars landscape. The carpet muffled all sounds and sucked Gideon's feet into its depths, but the most impressive item was the two-meter long, solid slab of mahogany that formed the top of the desk. Gideon couldn't even begin to calculate how much it would have cost to bring that piece of wood from Earth.

While thinking of costs, Gideon guessed that the jacket the lawyer was wearing couldn't have come off the rack and would have set an Earthforce Captain back at least two months pay. If he'd been paid. Magnusson's red blonde hair was immaculately and expensively cut, and the icy blue eyes that were currently staring at Gideon showed a keen brain moving behind them. He might have looked as if he ought be swinging a Viking battle-axe, but Magnusson was more likely to slice his victims to pieces with words. The lawyer and Max were currently swapping outrageous stories about their misbehavior during their undergraduate years, giving Gideon chance to size up the man to whom he was about to give everything he owned.

"Well, Captain, have you made up your mind? Do I pass?" The pale blue eyes, sparkling with amusement, pierced him.

Gideon gave a twisted smile. "So far so good. Now tell me how you're going to get Angel acquitted, and I'll tell you what grade you got."

Magnusson roared with laughter, making Gideon wince. He'd woken up that morning with the worst hangover he'd had in years. He hadn't actually finished Max's bottle of scotch before he'd passed out, but what was left wouldn't have made a Minbari go nuts, and everyone knew how little alcohol that took. When the alarm call that Max had so thoughtfully placed for him [Bastard!] had woken him, Gideon had found himself still fully dressed on the sofa. Dragging himself into the bathroom, he'd stripped off his dress uniform, and stood under the hot shower for ten minutes, emerging still feeling half dead, but only half. Walking back to the living area to get the vial of pills that Raven had sent him the night before, he'd found that a jug of something that looked like orange juice had been delivered while he was showering. The note with it was from Max. "This is the best hangover cure made on Mars. Drink ALL of it."

Feeling a bit like Alice in Wonderland, Gideon had poured one glass straight down, wondering if he'd grow or shrink, unable to remember which was which. It wasn't orange juice, but it wasn't bad either. He used a second glass to wash down two of Raven's pills and took a third back into the bathroom with him while he shaved. The image in the mirror didn't impress him much. [At least, I don't have to

look at that face today. The rest of the population of Mars will just have to live with it.]

By the time Max had arrived, Gideon had been washed, dressed, clean-shaven and looking more like a newly awakened zombie than an actual corpse. That was about as good as it was going to get.

Magnusson's laugh rattled his brain around inside his skull, but Gideon managed another twisted smile as the lawyer spoke. "For a man who looks as if he's had a fight with an angry Narn and lost, that's not bad, Captain. But I'm not going to tell you my trade secrets, until you tell me how you're going to pay me. And you're going to have to pay me a lot. Max will have told you that I don't do charity cases and from what I've heard, Earthforce personnel need all the charity they can get these days."

Looking round the office, Gideon could see where Magnusson's outrageous fees got spent. "Max tells me that you're expensive, but that you're worth it. He may have told you that I'm a gambler. Do you like to gamble, Mr. Magnusson? If you do, I have a deal for you."

The lawyer grinned. "I only bet on sure things, Captain. What's your deal?"

Gideon leaned forward in his chair. "Well, you tell me how sure a thing this is. I'll bet that you can't get Angel acquitted. If I win, I don't pay you a single credit. If I lose, and you get her off, I pay you with this." He reached into his jacket pocket and put a data crystal on the desk between them. Magnusson picked the crystal up with a huge but perfectly manicured hand, and rolled it between his fingers. The lawyer looked quizzically across at Gideon.

"That crystal holds the deeds and the latest valuation of my house on Earth. A few months ago it would have been worthless. Now..." Gideon gestured for Magnusson to drop the crystal into the reader on his desk.

The lawyer did as indicated and scanned through the documents held on the crystal. When he came to the valuation, he pursed his lips in approval. "Must be a nice house, Captain. I'll get the valuation independently checked of course, but assuming that it stands up, we have a deal. If I get Angel acquitted, I get the house. If I don't, I get nothing. Are those the terms?" Gideon nodded. Magnusson continued, "Are you happy for Max to hold the stakes until we know who's won?"

Gideon nodded again. "Now, tell me how you're going to take my house away from me."

Magnusson leaned forward and grinned wolfishly. Gideon was sure that he'd never seen quite so many gleaming white teeth displayed at one time before. The Big Bad Wolf would have been proud of that smile. [Why do I suddenly feel like one of the three little pigs?]

"Oh, that's easy, Captain. I'm going to put you on the stand as a hostile witness, and then I'm going to make you look like an idiot who can't tell his ass from his elbow, never mind act as a competent witness to a criminal offense. Fair enough?"

Gideon closed his eyes and sighed. He should have known better than to trust a friend of Max. Opening his eyes, he looked across at the Viking on the other side of the desk. "Whatever it takes. Just get her acquitted." Gideon took a deep breath and continued, "So what happens now? My knowledge of legal procedure on Mars is limited."

Magnusson explained that Angel would be brought to court later that day to be charged. "That's the first step, which has to take place within thirty-six hours of arrest. At that point the judge will make a

preliminary decision on whether there's a case to answer. In the light of Angel's confession in front of Carr, it's unlikely that the case will get thrown out at that stage. Assuming the judge decides that the case should go ahead, we then have forty-eight hours to put a defense together. We pride ourselves on swift justice on Mars. The good thing is that the prosecution has only the same amount of time to get their act in gear. It shouldn't be a problem in this case anyway. It rests entirely on witness statements, and I'm very good at making witnesses contradict themselves and crack up on the stand." The wolfish grin was back.

Gideon frowned. "I don't care what you do to me, but you don't put my crew through that. Particularly Dureena. She's been through enough."

Magnusson leaned back in his chair and pressed his fingers together, looking at Max and Gideon thoughtfully. He asked, "Which is more important to you? A few hurt feelings or saving that girl from being mind wiped for a crime you say she didn't commit? I suggest that you go away and sort out your priorities gentlemen, I'll see you in court at 18:00 hours." He stood and moved towards the door of the lavishly appointed office, clearly dismissing them both.

Gideon followed Max out into the street, where they stood looking at each other in silence for a few moments. Max eventually spoke. "Your house? That has to be just about the only asset you have left."

Gideon nodded. "It is. There wasn't a lot of choice really. But I don't want Deborah to know. Just make sure she knows that Magnusson is on the case will you? Don't tell her the terms."

Max frowned but finally agreed before continuing, "I'll talk to Dureena and warn her what Magnusson's likely to do. Maybe we can stop the prosecution calling her as a witness? Then he won't have to cross-examine her."

Gideon nodded. "I'll contact Carr and see what I can do. I'll try to persuade her to restrict the prosecution witnesses to John, you and me. I'll talk to John. I hate to put him through this, but I know he'll insist on doing what he can." He offered his hand to Max. "And thanks, if anyone can get Angel off, I think that Magnusson can. I bet he intimidates the court into agreeing with him. I just wish he could do the same to Deborah, but she's made of tougher stuff. She'd spit in his eye and tell him where to go." He was smiling ruefully as Max laughed.

Max studied him carefully. "What are you going to do about her? She'll be back at the Security Station by now. Are you going to try to see her there?"

Gideon shook his head. "No, I'll see her this evening in court. I think I need to give her some time to calm down, before I try to talk to her, and maybe when she sees Magnusson in action, she'll relent a little." He smiled sadly. "Maybe this time she won't hit me." He took a deep breath before going on. "I'll call in on Carr, then see if I can get some more sleep. I'd like to at least give the appearance of some semblance of humanity when I see Deborah this evening. Who knows? Maybe the rugged handsomeness will work if all else fails." Gideon turned and left Max standing in the street outside the lawyer's office.

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Demon was laughing quietly as she went through the door of Angel's cell, holding Marcus in her arms. The door slammed behind her with a loud bang, making her jump and Marcus cry. She started to soothe him through her link as she walked across the cell to where Angel sat on the edge of the bed. Sitting down beside her sister, Demon held Marcus out towards her. "Well, here's your nephew, who was in a perfectly good temper until that idiot slammed the door. Now he's going to whine at me that

it's all my fault. That's the problem with being a mother, *everything* is my fault as far as he's concerned."

Angel took the baby from her sister and held him gently in her arms, rocking him to soothe his whimpers and tears. She looked up at Demon and smiled. "He's beautiful, Demon." Looking back down, she gently stroked Marcus' blond curls with one hand while holding him close with the other. The baby gradually quieted as she rocked him and soon opened his large, hazel eyes to stare up at Angel. He reached out and grabbed one of her fingers, holding it tightly.

Angel looked up at her sister and grinned. "He's got your eyes, Demon, as well as your hair."

Demon shook her head. "His eyes may be the same color as mine, but their shape is pure Matthew. And his mouth is just like his father's too." Even thinking about Matthew hurt her, saying his name nearly choked her. She quickly pulled herself together and laughed. "And slamming the door was the only way the guard could get back at me."

Angel stared at Demon, her face showing her fear. "What did you do? Oh please, Demon, don't upset them. I've been told that people disappear from these cells and are never seen again, please don't..." Demon put her fingers to Angel's lips to stop her.

"It's OK, they'll soon calm down. It's just that Lieutenant Carr decided to get snotty about me bringing Marcus in, saying that the deal she'd done with Matthew only applied to me. When I offered to leave Marcus on her desk until I came out, she relented, but decided that she'd better search us both before I came through. I let them search my bag and pat me down then told Carr that I didn't want them handling Marcus, but that I'd strip him if she liked. She decided to take me up on that, but I think she regretted it when we got to his diaper. He must have been storing that one up for a while because it was an absolute stinker! You should have seen her face when the smell hit her."

Demon was grinning mischievously by now, and Angel was giggling. "You know, I don't think Lieutenant Carr is that fond of babies, because she told me to dress him again immediately, but I refused to put him back in a dirty diaper and changed him there and then. On her desk. Then I asked her where she wanted me to put the diaper. I could see her restraining herself from telling me exactly where to put it!"

Marcus had picked up on the two women's laughter and was smiling happily again, chuckling with them. Angel reached down and stroked his cheek, causing the baby to turn his face and latch on to the end of her finger, sucking hard. She looked up at Demon in surprise.

Demon smiled. "It's an instinctive response. Anyway, given half a chance, he'll suck on anything he can get in his mouth." She reached into the bag she had slung over her shoulder and pulled out Half-Ted. Marcus' eyes lit up when he saw his favorite toy, and he immediately abandoned Angel's hand to grab at the bear. As soon as he had it firmly in his grasp, the ear went straight into his mouth. Demon laughed, "See what I mean? That poor bear will be earless soon."

She lifted her left hand to stroke Angel's hair. "You know, I'm getting used to this. It really does suit you." She tried not to think about how large Angel's eyes looked in her too thin face. "How are you feeling today?"

Angel smiled. "Much better. They brought me breakfast and although it wasn't very interesting, it's more than I've been used to eating in a day. And they gave me some water to drink and even some hot water to wash with." She smiled bravely at Demon. "If I'd known I'd be looked after this well, I'd have

let myself be arrested ages ago."

Demon smiled back, covering her sadness that such small things had come to mean so much to Angel. She decided not to tell her sister that the only reason she was being treated so well was because all her food and drink was being provided from outside. John had told Demon about the arrangements that Matthew had made for Angel, and the deal he'd done to get his wife access to her sister. Demon was now more confused than ever. Matthew had made sure that her sister got the best treatment he could arrange. He'd even risked a reprimand from Earthforce for misuse of supplies. And Demon knew that right now Matthew was with Max, arranging for a lawyer to represent Angel. She wanted to thank him for doing all these things, but couldn't get beyond the fact that they wouldn't have been necessary if he hadn't had Angel arrested.

It was breaking her heart that he'd made no attempt to see her or Marcus, and she'd concluded that she'd pushed him too far. She was sure that Matthew had given up on her and decided that it was over between them. Demon couldn't decide how to feel about that, and it took all of her iron control to prevent herself projecting her confusion. The thought of living without him gave her pain beyond description. And where would she go? Back to Eriadne? But what about Lily and Ilas? If Demon returned to their home, her sisters would have to go with her, they couldn't break their link. But if Ilas and Lily wanted to stay with their partners, Demon would have to go with them on the Excalibur. Would Matthew take her if they were no longer together? Could she bear to be on his ship, seeing him, hearing him, but never touching him? The thought of living like that was unbearable, but Demon knew that she might have to put up with it, if Matthew didn't want her back and she didn't want to hurt her sisters. It was all too confusing. She pushed the thoughts away and brought her attention back to the present.

She discovered that Angel was watching her carefully, a worried frown on her face. "What's the matter, Demon?"

Demon smiled and reached out to pat Angel's hand where she held Marcus. "Nothing. I'm fine. And I've got a present for you from Lily." She reached into her bag again and pulled out a small make-up bag. "Lily thought you might like a few bit and pieces to make yourself look prettier. I told her that you didn't need it, but she pouted at me and told me that just because I never wear the stuff, I shouldn't deprive you. Here, let me take Marcus."

Angel handed back the baby and took the small bag, looking inside to find lipstick, mascara and a few other things. She smiled up at Demon. "Lily was right. I haven't had chance to wear make-up since I arrived on Mars. This is a real treat. But why hasn't she or Ilas come to see me?" She looked sad and hurt, and Demon rushed to explain.

"I asked them not to. I wanted to have you all to myself for a while. We'll soon have you out of here, then you can spend as much time with them as you like, but for now I'm being selfish. Can you forgive me?" Angel leaned forward and hugged her sister, then stood.

Demon watched as Angel walked to the mirror over the basin and started to skillfully apply foundation. Within minutes, Angel appeared to have a natural color that had been sadly missing before. Her eyes sparkled with delight at the improvement in her own appearance. Angel was coming back to life.

Demon smiled as her sister came back to sit by her and took Marcus from her again. "Does he mind being picked up and passed around?" Angel asked as she took him.

Demon shook her head. "No, he's a tactile little thing. Loves to touch and be touched. Not like me at all." She pulled her bag onto her knee and started to rummage around in it.

Angel laughed as she bounced Marcus on her knee. "What have you got in there, Demon? It looks like a bottomless pit!"

Demon pulled out a small packet and unwrapped it. Inside were fresh bread rolls she'd bought from a bakery on her way to the Security station. "I wasn't sure if they'd be feeding you properly, so I brought these and somewhere..." she rummaged further, "Ah! Here it is!" Demon produced a small pot of honey and then a plastic knife. She grinned at Angel. "I'm surprised they didn't take this off me. Nasty weapon this could be. Do you want them?"

Angel's eyes were fixed greedily on the rolls. She glanced up at Demon and licked her lips. "All for me?" Demon nodded and laughed, as Angel put Marcus down on the bed, grabbed the bread and started tearing into it.

"Slow down, or you'll choke! I can get more for you later if you want them, and I've got a few other things for you in here, anyway." She pulled out fruit, a chocolate bar and a bottle of water, noticing that Angel watched her every move, but didn't slow in lashing honey onto the rolls and eating them rapidly. Demon suppressed the pain and anger she felt at seeing her sister so desperate for food.

There was a nudge at Demon's link with her son, and she looked down at him as he stared up at her. "No. You can't possibly be hungry yet. I only fed you a couple of hours ago. You're just greedy and don't want to be left out when your auntie is eating." The baby's face started to crumple and tears leaked from his eyes. Demon sighed. "You are such a little monster. Oh, all right then." She started to unbutton her shirt and was instantly rewarded by a big smile.

Hearing a muffled laugh, she looked across to see Angel watching her. Angel swallowed quickly and said, "He's got you right where he wants you, hasn't he? I never thought I'd see the day when my big sister was at the beck and call of any male."

Demon snorted as she lifted the baby to her breast. His mouth eagerly surrounded her nipple, and he started to suck vigorously. "Well, he'd better make the most of it. I'm going to start weaning him in a little while. He'll be getting teeth soon, and it will hurt when he bites!" She sat back against the wall as Marcus suckled, watching Angel finish all the food she'd brought with her.

Angel sighed with contentment and sat back next to Demon, looking down at the baby as he fed. They sat quietly for some time, with only Marcus's soft snuffles breaking the silence. They both jumped at the sound of the door opening and were startled to see the huge man standing in the doorway.

Demon looked up at the stranger... and up... and up. He seemed to fill the doorframe, blocking the light from outside. She quickly pulled her shirt across, to at least partially cover herself, while letting Marcus continue feeding. Demon wanted to stand and confront the stranger, but with the baby firmly attached to her breast, she couldn't easily move. Pulling herself more upright on the bed, Demon moved her body between Angel and the doorway. She could feel Angel trembling, trying to hide behind her, as the man stood looking down at them both.

"Who are you? And what do you want?" Demon used her most imperious tone of voice, the one that sent most people running for cover.

The man stepped forward and grinned, not fazed at all. "Mrs. Gideon, I presume?"



Demon stared into his icy blue eyes. "My name is Deborah Montgomery. Ms. Montgomery to you." Her voice dripped icicles.

The man roared with laughter, frightening Angel even more. Demon moved further in front of her sister, shielding her from the gigantic man. When he spoke again, his voice was filled with good humor. "I'd heard that you're a fighter. Punched your husband out during the wedding ceremony, I believe. Well, I hope that your sister enjoys a scrap too, because we're going to fight her case together. Bjorn Magnusson, at your service, madam."

His hand darted out and grabbed Demon's right hand, causing her to let out a grunt of pain as he squeezed on it. The lawyer dropped her hand quickly, staring at the clearly visible bruises. "You should get that seen to, there could be something broken."

Demon shook her head. "It's not important. So, you must be the lawyer Max has recommended." She watched as the huge man bowed slightly and pulled the only chair in the cell toward him. As he sat, he turned to the guard still standing in the doorway.

"That'll be all. I need to see my client in private now."

The door banged shut again.

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Magnusson was finding it hard to drag his eyes away from where the baby was feeding. He could see enough of what the child was feeding on, to wish he could exchange places. Max had described Deborah Gideon but that description didn't do her justice. She was magnificent! Magnusson could see that she'd be tall when she stood, and he loved tall women. Tight black jeans, that concealed nothing of her shape, covered her long legs, and he could see enough of her upper body, through the gap in her black shirt, to see how good a figure she had. The lawyer found himself wishing he'd done a different deal with Gideon. He'd have happily given his services free, in exchange for a night in this woman's bed. Magnusson quickly suppressed an image of how she'd look spread naked across the desk in his office, and quelled the surge of lust that went with it.

"Why don't you introduce me to my client?" Magnusson stopped staring at Demon's breasts and shifted his gaze to the other woman. To his surprise, he could see that she too was beautiful. Too thin by far, but the bones that showed much too clearly were beautifully shaped, and she had the most amazing blue eyes he'd ever seen. Pity that she was too small for him. He'd have crushed her if he tried to have sex with her. Now her sister... Magnusson's eyes strayed back to where Demon was detaching the baby from her breast and covering herself. For one moment, he caught a glimpse of her nipple before she could close her shirt, and again had to suppress a flare of lust. This time, the image had been of his own mouth, firmly fixed to that nipple, biting and mauling it. He pushed the image aside and leaned forward to look into Angel's eyes.

"I'm here to help you, not to hurt you." He lowered the tone of his voice, speaking softly to reassure the obviously terrified girl. "I know that some terrible things have happened to you, but I need you to tell me everything. Will you do that?" Magnusson reached out very slowly and pushed a strand of hair back from Angel's face.

Angel flinched slightly, but didn't actually pull away, as she nodded and whispered, "Yes."

Gideon leaned against the closed door of the hotel room for a moment with his eyes shut, mentally running through all the things he'd needed to do and ticking them off. He'd arranged for a regular supply of appropriate food and drink to be provided to Angel. She'd also received the medical attention she needed, the lawyer was sorted, and Deborah had access to her sister whenever she wanted it. He'd dropped by the Security station to see Lieutenant Carr and been puzzled by how easily she'd agreed not to call Dureena as a witness. Carr had almost seemed distracted, and Gideon had assumed that she must have been working on something else. But the important thing was that she'd agreed.

So what else? Oh yes, the minor issue of trying to stop his wife leaving him and taking their child with her. Gideon decided to postpone that one, as he had absolutely no idea how to tackle it anyway. Maybe it would get easier after the court date that evening. He might get the opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to getting Angel acquitted. He was damned sure that words alone were not going to be enough to convince Deborah at this stage.

Gideon swallowed the wave of loss and loneliness that swept over him as he thought of her and Marcus. It had been over twenty-four hours since he'd last seen them, and he missed them both dreadfully. In just the few days since they'd joined him on the Excalibur, they'd become the center of his life. He had no idea how to even start coping with the thought of losing them, so he kept trying to avoid thinking about it.

Gideon opened his eyes and checked the time. He still had a couple of hours before he was due to meet with Sarah and Alwyn, to say goodbye. They were leaving for Earth that afternoon, as Sarah couldn't stay away from her job any longer. Just time for him to catch up on some sleep. Although he'd been unconscious for several hours the previous night, he still felt exhausted and drained by the events of the last day. Pulling himself upright, Gideon had started to stagger through to the bedroom, when a voice stopped him.

"What have you been up to, Matthew? Is being a newly wed so exhausting? You really ought to ask Demon to go easy on you, if you end up looking like this."

Gideon spun around to see Galen emerging from the kitchen area of the suite, pushing his hood back as he walked.

"Tell me, do all Technomages have something against doors? I've finally got Alwyn trained to knock first, and now you come back with all your bad habits." Gideon grinned to take the sting out of his words. "It's good to see you again, Galen. I'm sorry you didn't make it to the wedding. Things got interesting." His smile faded quickly.

Galen moved to the window and turned to stand with his back to it, looking at Gideon as he dropped to the sofa. "Interesting? What did I miss? And where's Demon? Surely you can't have lost her already? That would be extremely careless, Matthew."

Gideon closed his eyes against the pain of Galen's joke, trying to think of a suitable answer. He heard Galen speak again. "Matthew? Are you all right? What's been going on?" He looked up to see a worried frown on Galen's face.

"You might want to sit down, Galen. It's a long story."

In as few words as possible, Gideon described what had taken place at the wedding when Angel had

appeared. When he got to the part where Security arrived to arrest Angel, Galen exploded. The Technomage stood above him, dark and menacing, his hand raised and a glow starting to build as he created a fireball.

"You had her arrested? When she was sick and in desperate need of medical attention? You called Security! What sort of man are you? You're as responsible for her condition as anyone. How could you treat her so badly?"

Gideon looked up at the fireball growing in Galen's hand and spoke softly. "And Galen the Guiltless is going to throw the first stone, is he? How much did you making a pass at Angel have to do with her bringing Lucas back, Galen? Oh yeah, I know about that little faux pas. She thought you were her friend and felt totally betrayed when you tried to seduce her. We've all played our part in this."

The fireball brightened. "At least I didn't half rape her." Galen's voice was low and threatening.

Gideon bit down on his response. "No, I did that. Galen, we can sit here all afternoon, swapping insults about the mistakes we've made with Angel and the damage we've done. But maybe it would be better for her, if we focused on how we get her out of this mess." He watched as the Technomage subsided onto a chair opposite, then he sighed and carried on with his story, as Galen sat stony faced, listening.

When Gideon finished, he looked over at Galen and said, "I know exactly how much I've contributed to the state Angel is in now, and believe me, I'm doing everything I can to make sure she doesn't suffer the consequences of my actions. But I had no choice, Galen, not if I was going to keep my promise to Dureena."

Galen nodded. "I understand that. And I understand how important that promise would have been to both of you. But the risk is appalling. What if this lawyer can't get Angel acquitted? What if she's found guilty and sentenced to Death of Personality?" His face clearly showed his horror at this prospect.

Gideon leaned forward. "It won't come to that. Magnusson is the best, and I'll do whatever I can short of perjuring myself to make it clear that Angel wasn't responsible. And if that doesn't work..." his voice trailed off, then firmed as he continued, "I'll think of something."

Galen leaned back in his seat and sighed. "I'd hoped to get the chance to meet your son. Marcus? That's what you called him?"

Gideon nodded. "I wouldn't mind a chance to see him myself. And his mother. I think they're both down at the Security Station with Angel, so if you plan on going down there you'll see them all. Lieutenant Carr won't let you in, but that's never stopped you." He smiled across at Galen. "If you see them, give them my... no, never mind."

He took a deep breath and changed the subject, before Galen could respond. "So what are you doing here, Galen? You're a day late for the wedding, so it can't be that."

Galen smiled. "I got held up. I'd every intention of being here in time for the ceremonies, but a small detour in hyperspace took longer than I'd anticipated. But the main reason for my being here is to attempt a reconciliation. I know that you don't need me, now that you've found the cure, but I would like to rejoin the Excalibur. Alwyn has told me of your new mission, and I would like to be a part of it. He's also convinced me that you would understand why I felt I had to help Lucas Buck, and that the time has come to tell you my reasons. But in the light of what else is going on, perhaps that can wait."

Gideon shook his head. "No, tell me now. Anything that distracts me from this mess is welcome at the moment. I need to know, to understand, what it was that drove you to help Lucas escape and to betray my trust. You'd made me a promise that you'd never do that again, and you broke that promise. I need to understand why." Gideon stood and started to pace the room. "I know that I was angrier than I should have been, because Deborah had been hurt by what you did. If I over-reacted then, I'm sorry. But tell me why you did it."

Gideon leaned back against the windowsill as Galen sat silent, with his head bowed. The Technomage finally looked up and spoke softly. "This is difficult, Matthew. I had to betray you to prevent Lucas from disclosing information about my order that must never be known. Now I'm betraying my order to regain your friendship. Whichever way I turn, I end up a traitor to something that I believe in. But these were my reasons." He went on to explain the source of the Technomage powers, how Lucas had known that source, and the messages that had been sent containing that information. "I can only assume that Lucas is alive somewhere, as none of those messages has arrived since you lost track of him. Whatever else he is, it would appear that he's a man of his word."

Gideon stood, frozen in place by the shock of what he'd just learned. The Technomages used Shadow technology. The servants of the Shadows had seeded the Earth with their plague, but Shadow technology was being used to save Earth, in the form of the viral screen that Alwyn had helped them develop from the Technomage virus. He realized that Galen was still speaking.

"I'm sorry, Matthew. I know that this must be incredibly difficult for you to accept. That's partly why I couldn't tell you. I feared that this knowledge would destroy our friendship. Whichever way I looked at it, I couldn't see a way out. If I refused to tell you my reasons, you would never forgive my betrayal, but if I told you, you would never forgive me or my order for what we are."

Gideon pulled himself together and moved away from the window to sit back on the sofa. "That's a feeling I know all too well. I faced the same one about Angel. If I followed through on my promise to Dureena, then I'd lose Deborah and Marcus. If I failed to deliver on that promise, then I'd lose the respect and trust of everyone who knows about it, including my self-respect. The classic no-win scenario." He took a deep breath. "Let me think about this. It's a lot to take in." Gideon looked straight into Galen's eyes as he continued, "But nothing changes the fact that you saved my life when my ship was destroyed and on several occasions since. I want you back on my team. The problem is that I have no idea how to convince the others, and Max, Ilas, and Dureena are going to take a lot of convincing."

Galen nodded. "I know. And what about Demon? Can you convince her? I know how much she hates me, because I helped Lucas take Angel away from her. Alwyn has spent the last few months convincing me that my judgment of her and her sisters was ill considered. If she's your wife, it's important that we repair the breach that exists between us. Do you have any idea how that can be achieved?"

Gideon shook his head. "It may not be necessary. I'm not sure how long she plans to stay my wife." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the two rings that he'd carried with him every moment since finding them the previous day. "She left these behind, when she walked out. I don't think she has any intention of coming back." Gideon closed his eyes again, fighting against the overwhelming pain that thought caused him.

"Matthew, you have no idea how sorry I am to hear that. I know how it feels to lose someone you love." Galen's voice was filled with sorrow.

Gideon took another deep breath and sat up straight on the sofa. "Well, she'll have to fight me if she

wants to get away. I'll be damned if I'm going to let her go that easily." He glanced at the clock on the wall. "Come on, we're late. I should have been upstairs half an hour ago to say goodbye to Alwyn and Sarah. You can start trying to persuade the others now."

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Demon watched in awe as Magnusson coaxed the story out of Angel. Her first impressions had been of a brutish lout who couldn't keep either his eyes or his hands to himself. She'd felt his flares of lust for her and been appalled. She didn't want to be treated like a piece of meat to be inspected then devoured. Demon hated the thought of any man other than Matthew wanting her. She closed her eyes briefly to hide the pain that came with that thought. Matthew might never want her again, so what did it matter what other men wanted?

But as she'd listened to Magnusson's gentle questioning, she'd gained respect for his intelligence and his sensitivity. Gradually, he'd got Angel to relax and tell her story, getting more details from her than she'd given Demon the night before. And some of those details horrified her sister. At one point, when Angel was describing her injuries after Smith had attacked her, Demon lost control of her emotions and a wave of anger and sorrow escaped her.

Magnusson looked round sharply. "Was that you?" He asked accusingly.

Demon nodded, ashamed that her control had failed her for a moment.

"Are you a telepath as well, or just an empath?"

"Just an empath, projecting and receiving."

Magnusson raised an eyebrow. "That could be very useful to us. Keep your mouth shut about it. We don't want the prosecution to find out, or they may ban you from the court."

Demon bridled at his tone, but realized the sense of his words. She nodded again as Magnusson went back to his questioning. After a couple of hours, the lawyer stood abruptly. "I'm hungry. Wait here." Banging on the door of the cell, he summoned a guard and disappeared.

Demon and Angel looked at each other and started to laugh. Demon put her finger to her lips and looked down at where Marcus was sleeping in her arms before speaking softly. "He's an absolute monster! I wonder where Max found him? Oh but Angel, I think he's good. I think he's very good indeed. If anyone can get you out of this mess I think he can."

Angel nodded and smiled mischievously. "He's rather taken with you, Demon. Did you see the way he looked at you when he arrived? He looked like he wanted to eat you alive."

Demon snorted. "He can look all he likes, but if he tries to touch he'll find himself short of a few fingers." She stood and passed Marcus gently over to Angel. "Here, take him will you? I'll go and get us something to eat. Mr. Magnusson seems to have forgotten that he's not the only one who gets hungry."

She turned and started to walk towards the door when it was flung open, Magnusson again filling the entire frame. "Are you leaving us, Mrs. Gideon?"

Demon gritted her teeth. "I told you my name, please have the courtesy to use it, Mr. Magnusson." She

watched the lazy smile that settled round Magnusson's lips as he stepped forward, forcing her to retreat or to make contact with him.

"It seems that you find the name 'Gideon' offensive. Perhaps I can help you dispose of it. My card." He held out a thin plastic rectangle. "I don't normally do divorce work, but for you I'd make an exception."

Demon spun around as she heard Angel gasp, "Demon, no!" She ran back to her sister and pulled her into her arms as she saw the tears welling up in Angel's eyes. They held each other tightly, with Marcus held between them until they heard the door opening again. Three guards entered the room, one carrying a table, the next a large tray full of covered dishes and the third a large box, which was placed on the bed next to the women. Magnusson nodded as the tray was placed on the table and the guards left, closing the door behind them. Demon looked up at him, as he smiled and gestured at the table.

"Lunch." He paused for a moment and when neither of them moved, the lawyer pulled the chair over to the table and sat, starting to uncover the dishes. Delicious smells wafted through the cell. He loaded one plate with items from several dishes and held it out toward them. Demon shook her head, but took Marcus from Angel, so that her sister could take the plate. Soon Angel and Magnusson were matching each other, fork for fork, in clearing their plates. Demon watched with some amusement for a moment, then looked down at Marcus in distress. He also wanted his lunch, and he wanted it NOW! She hated the idea of feeding him in front of Magnusson, but knew that her son would start to cry bitterly if she didn't do so soon. This time his hunger pangs were real.

Demon did her best to turn herself away from Magnusson as she undid her shirt, sliding the baby's head through the gap so she could stay covered. Marcus wasn't entirely happy about this novel position, but as soon as he got her nipple in his mouth and started to suck, he stopped worrying. The two diners soon cleared their plates, and Magnusson again asked Demon if she wanted anything. She refused again and watched him divide the remains of the dishes between his plate and Angel's, then continue eating. For the next few minutes, the only sounds were of consumption, theirs and Marcus'.

When Magnusson had finished, he pushed back from the table and stood, stretching, then turned and picked up the box from the bed. Taking off the lid, he tipped the contents onto the bed. Inside were a beautifully tailored black skirt and jacket, with a red silk shirt. Black shoes with low heels fell out onto the bed with them, followed by a froth of red silk lingerie. The lawyer picked up the jacket and held it against Angel. He looked critically then nodded. "It'll do. We can't have you going into court looking like a bum." He stared down at Angel as she sat, touching the silk shirt gently with her hands. "I'll come back for you at 17:00, be changed and ready."

Angel looked up at him and whispered, "How did you know what to get me?"

Magnusson grinned. "I wouldn't have known where to start, but I got Max to ask your sister--Lily, is it?--to get what was needed." He turned to look at Demon, running his eyes over her from head to foot, before finally moving his gaze to her face. Demon felt herself blushing under the intensity of his stare. He spoke quietly. "If you want to come with us, then be here as well. But wear something more formal and leave the kid behind." He spun on his heel and started towards the door.

Demon stopped him before he could leave. "Mr. Magnusson, we haven't discussed how we're going to pay you. And now we owe you for more than your professional services." She gestured at the clothes on the bed. "If you can wait a few days, I'll be able to get funds together to cover your fees and costs."

Magnusson grinned wolfishly. "I'd rather take payment in kind. There are a number of services that

you could perform for me." Demon drew herself up and was about to let rip, when he laughed again. "Don't worry about it Mrs. Gideon, your husband has made all the arrangements. This isn't going to cost you a credit." He turned and marched out of the cell.

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## The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

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