

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

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Angel and Demon finally reunited by Lilith

## Chapter 1

Gideon approached the door to his hotel room with some apprehension, well aware that he'd been indulging in some major avoidance activity by delaying his return until the late evening. The confrontation he anticipated with Deborah was something he'd been dreading, unable to see any way that it could end positively. Maybe if he gave her enough time to calm down...

His head was throbbing worse than ever. With one thing and another, he hadn't got round to asking the medical staff, brought down from the Excalibur, for any painkillers for himself, being too busy making sure that Carr got the assistance and supplies she needed. He'd checked with Carr before leaving and been told that Deborah hadn't arrived, so he expected to find her in their rooms. Gideon could only assume that his wife hadn't taken any calls or let anyone in, so John hadn't been able to get his message to her. Deborah must have even cut herself off from her sisters, or Lily would have got a message to her over their link. Well, at least that meant he had good news for her. Maybe that would help. [I'm clutching at straws here...]

Bracing himself, Gideon slid the keycard into the lock and entered the room, calling her name. Silence. [Damn. I must have missed her.] His head was pounding by now, and he remembered Deborah packing a small emergency medical kit before they came down; maybe she'd have some painkillers in that.

Crossing the living room and bedroom with his hand shading his eyes against the overhead light, the glare from which just made the headache worse, Gideon entered the bathroom and looked round, searching for Deborah's wash bag, where he knew she kept the kit. It wasn't on the vanity unit where it had been earlier. Looking around, he realized that there was nothing in the bathroom that belonged to her, no toothbrush, no soap, no robe, nothing. He started to feel sick and knew that it had nothing to do with the headache.

Gideon ran back into the bedroom and flung open the wardrobe doors. The only clothes that hung there were his. He then realized that the cot in the corner of the room had disappeared. Thinking it through, he decided that this was a good sign. If she'd had the cot moved, it must mean that she was still in the hotel. And the most likely place for her to be...

He called John over the commlink, who confirmed that Deborah had arrived with Marcus and her things a short time before. She'd moved into the suite he shared with Luke and Lily. "But she's not here now, Matthew. I gave her your message, and she asked Lily to look after Marcus. She left for the Security station a few minutes ago. We all wanted to go with her, but she insisted that she wanted to spend some time alone with Angel. We had to respect that." Gideon agreed and asked John to call him as soon as Deborah got back. He also asked if Luke could bring down some painkillers. Matheson confirmed that Raven would drop by, then signed off.

Gideon sat down hard on the end of the bed, appalled that Deborah hadn't even given him chance to talk before moving her things out, but he decided to deal with that when she returned from the Security station. He shook his head to try to clear it and caught sight of his class ring lying on the dressing table where he'd left it that morning. Seeing what was lying next to it, Gideon's stomach turned and he nearly vomited. Standing and slowly walking across the room, every step produced a painful vibration in his skull. Reaching down, he picked up the two rings that lay next to his. The plain gold band that he'd placed on Deborah's finger a few hours before and the gold and diamond ring that she'd accepted when she agreed to marry him. His wife had left them both behind.

Clenching his fist around the rings, Gideon closed his eyes, breathing deeply while he worked on containing the flood of guilt, anger and loss that threatened to overwhelm him. He'd known that he would have to fight to keep her, but it had never occurred to him that even that opportunity would be denied him, that Deborah would hate and despise him so much that she would just leave without even saying goodbye.

Gideon walked back to the large bed and fell backwards onto it, totally drained of energy. His head was pounding, and his stomach was churning. He wondered what Deborah would do next. Would she find a lawyer and sue for divorce? Hell, she didn't even need to do that. The marriage had never been consummated. She could go for an annulment. Momentarily, he smiled bitterly, remembering his thoughts as they'd kissed in the church. Maybe he should have made love to her on the altar steps after all. At least that way, it would have been more difficult for her to leave him.

Gideon wondered whether he should fight her, making it as difficult as possible for her to break away, buying some time to try to win her back. Or would that just make her hate him even more? If that were possible. But the pain in his head and the nausea made it hard for him to think constructively. All

he really wanted to do was to swallow the painkillers that Luke was bringing and go to sleep. Maybe he'd have some better ideas in the morning.

The door buzzer sounded and he dragged himself upright, his right hand still clenched tightly around the two rings, as he staggered into the living room, croaking, "Open," and collapsing onto the sofa. To his surprise, it wasn't Luke standing in the doorway, but Max.

Gideon started to say, "Max, whatever you want, can we talk about it tomorr..." but trailed off as Max lifted the bottle of single malt whisky he held in his right hand and waved it gently.

"I thought you might need a couple of shots. And I met Raven on the way down, and he told me to give you these." Max offered a small vial of pills. "Raven said take two tonight, and if you insist on drinking scotch with me, don't complain to him about your hangover in the morning, just take two more."

Gideon leaned forward to take the vial from Max, tipped two pills into his palm and swallowed them dry. "I'll worry about that then. But I warn you, Max, if you open that bottle, I might just crawl inside it." He watched as Max walked into the kitchen area, took two glasses from a cupboard, then came back to sit on a chair opposite him. Max poured two generous measures and pushed a glass across the table between them, toward Gideon.

"I hear that your wife has a hell of a right hook." Max grinned at Gideon. "Damn, I wish I'd been there to see that. There have been a number of occasions when I'd have liked to do that myself."

Gideon lifted the glass with his left hand and took a mouthful of the smooth, golden liquid, letting it slide slowly down his throat, savoring the smoky flavor and the gentle burn as it went down. He looked across at Max and spoke quietly. "I'm not sure that 'wife' is the correct term. And even if it is, it looks like it's a temporary condition." He opened his right hand, displaying the two rings on his palm.

Max took a sharp breath. "Oh, shit. I hadn't realized she'd gone that far." He looked into Gideon's eyes, and his expression reinforced the sincerity of his words. "I'm really sorry, Captain."

Gideon swallowed the remaining contents of his glass and leaned forward, offering the glass for a refill. Max obliged, with a larger measure than he'd poured the first time, before he continued speaking. "I've got a message for you from Dureena. Well, not just from Dureena, it's from Ilas and me too, but mostly from Dureena."

Gideon sat back in the sofa and took another drink, waiting for Max to continue. He wasn't sure whether it was the pills or the scotch, but he was starting to feel a pleasant buzz. He just wished that Max would leave the bottle and go, so he could get himself disgustingly drunk, fall asleep and never wake up. The silence lengthened as Max waited for a response that Gideon was too tired to give.

"Don't you want to know what the message is?" Max looked quizzically across at Gideon.

Gideon took another healthy pull at the whisky then sighed, "Sure, Max. Give me the message." He closed his eyes and waited for the next blow to fall. The way that day had gone, it could only be bad news.

"You're off the hook." Gideon opened his eyes just enough to peer at Max. "You kept your promise and that's enough. You don't need to do any more."

Gideon smiled bitterly. "I've already done more than enough, as far as Deborah is concerned." He closed his eyes again, wishing that Max would just go and leave him to wallow in self-pity for a while.

He heard Max speak. "In that case, maybe we'd better start planning on how you're going to get her back. I can only think of one way to do that right now."

Gideon opened his eyes and stared across at Max. "Well, that's one more than I can think of, so I guess that makes you a genius after all, Mr. Eilerson." He emptied his glass again.

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Max was trying hard to hide how appalled he was at the way Gideon looked. He'd never imagined that the Captain could look so... defeated. His face was an unhealthy gray, emphasized by the dark circles under his eyes and the lines that seemed etched from his nose to his mouth and across his forehead. He was slumped back in the sofa, apparently drained of energy. He looked ten years older than when Max had seen him earlier. While Max was willing to concede that much of the pain that showed so clearly in Gideon's face was attributable to the killer headache he was suffering, he knew that there was another reason for the pain, and that reason may well have been worse than the headache.

Eilerson thought about all the times he'd wished he could see Gideon like this. The meetings where Gideon had slapped him down in front of the others, making snide comments about Max's voracious appetite for money and other pleasures. To have that smart mouth silenced and to see the natural arrogance of the man totally drained had been a small fantasy of Eilerson's since his first weeks aboard the Excalibur. Well, finally it had happened. Gideon had met his match and had the stuffing knocked out of him, and the sight gave Max no pleasure whatsoever.

In Max's time aboard the Excalibur, the archeologist had slowly come to realize that behind the Captain's façade of arrogance and acidity was a man who cared deeply for his crew and their mission. Gideon was someone who drove his people hard, but someone who drove himself ten times harder. The older man had finally concluded that while he may never like Gideon, he actually respected the bastard.

The events of that day had been tough for everyone but hardest on Demon and Gideon. And Dureena. She was covering well, but the shock of seeing Angel again had brought the memories and emotions of her loss back in full force, but she was determined not to give into those emotions for Ilas' sake. When Max, Ilas and Dureena had brought the children back to the hotel earlier, Ilas had been distraught. Angel's appearance and collapse had sent Ilas into shock, and he and Dureena had half carried her back to the hotel, but once they'd arrived things had got worse.

Lily had sent the news of Angel's arrest over their link, and Ilas had tried to go back to the church as soon as she heard. Max and Dureena had been forced to physically restrain her. The news of the fight between Demon and Gideon that followed shortly thereafter had knocked Ilas sideways. She'd started to sob hysterically, rocking back and forth, screaming that it would kill Demon, that Demon would die without Gideon, and how could she and Lily go on with both of their sisters gone?

It was as he and Dureena had tried to calm and comfort Ilas, that Max came to the conclusion that all this had to stop. When they'd finally calmed Ilas enough to get her to sleep, he'd taken Dureena into the living room of their suite and told her as much. To his surprise, she'd agreed. The pain that Angel's arrest and prosecution was causing was more than it was worth. Dureena told him that she was appalled at the price Gideon was having to pay to keep his word to her, and that she would do whatever she could to help him and Demon to heal their rift. Max had no idea where she got the

strength to do that. His love for the little Zanderi had nearly burst out of him at that moment. They'd arrived at a plan and agreed that Max would see Gideon as soon as the hotel reception notified them of his return. Max just hoped it wasn't too late.

He leaned forward and poured Gideon a third glass of scotch. [Damn it, Captain! This is a twenty year old Laphroaig, you could at least taste it on the way down.]

"Dureena and I talked it over. The only way we can see to stop this whole nightmare is to get Angel acquitted of the charges you've brought against her. That way, you've kept your promise in bringing those responsible to justice." Max held his hand up as Gideon went to interrupt him. "OK, I know that there's a lot of doubt as to how guilty Angel is, and that Lucas is still out there. Dureena still expects us to go on looking for him, but in the light of Ilas and her sisters being so convinced that Angel is innocent, she's willing to let the case against Angel go."

Max watched as Gideon slumped back into the sofa again, somehow not spilling a drop from his glass as he did so. Gideon spoke with his eyes closed tightly. "I wish to God that Dureena had come to that conclusion a day earlier. Angel could be in a hospital bed now, rather than a cell, and I could be in bed with my wife, doing what newly weds are supposed to do." He sat forward in his seat and put the glass down on the table, freeing his left hand to rub his forehead. Max noticed that his right hand remained clenched around the two rings he held there.

Gideon looked up at Max and shook his head. "It's too late, Max. The charges have been made, and Angel more or less confessed to the crime in front of Mars Security. How in hell are we supposed to get her acquitted?"

Max grinned wolfishly. "We employ the best lawyer on Mars to defend her, that's what we do. And he just happens to be an old college friend of mine. Well, friend is an exaggeration really. We fought each other to a standstill in the Debating Society on more than one occasion. But he's the best, and we have an appointment to see him at nine tomorrow morning." He watched Gideon carefully as he went on. This was delicate, and he needed to handle it right. "The only problem is that he charges in line with his reputation. It's going to cost a lot to get him to do this. Now, I know that Demon is selling books to raise funds, but I doubt if she's going to get credits fast enough to pay him. And I also know that Earthforce hasn't been... regular in its remuneration policy for a while now. So I suggest that you let me cover the initial costs, and then you and Demon can sort out how to..." he trailed off as Gideon shook his head.

"Forget it, Max. It's kind of you to offer, but not necessary. I can cover the costs. I still have some assets, and I can use them to get this done. But is there really any chance that this can work?"

Max grinned across the table. "Magnusson hasn't lost a case in years. If he takes it on, he'll win it. Then it'll be up to you to convince Demon that she should come back. He can't help you with that one, Captain." He stood and looked down at Gideon. He didn't know if it was the scotch or the news, but Gideon's color looked better than when he'd arrived and his posture no longer screamed defeat. "Good night, Captain. I'll see you tomorrow."

Eilerson left the bottle on the table and wondered if Gideon would finish it. He could hardly blame the man if he did, but hoped that he'd be in a fit state to see the lawyer in the morning.

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Demon sensed Angel's breathing stall, as she cut yet another tangled knot of hair and hesitated before

she let the lock fall amongst the others on the floor. She closed her eyes, locking her emotions down. She was determined not to let her feelings get the better of her. She needed to be strong for her sister.

Demon took another lock of hair between her fingers and once again cut through it. She was trying her best to be careful, but her bruised and swollen right hand made her awkward. Angel remained silent on the chair. As Demon continued cutting away the tangled mess, she thought back on her arrival in the cell a few hours earlier.

It had been an emotional reunion. Walking into the cell, she had once again been taken aback at Angel's appearance. She'd stood motionless in the doorway, until Angel had looked up from where she was sitting on the edge of the bed staring at the floor. The pain in Angel's eyes was enough to send Demon rushing to take her sister into her arms. For what seemed like an eternity, she had held onto her sister as sobs wracked the younger woman's body. Unable to say anything, Demon had just held her, until finally Angel's sobs subsided.

In the hours that had followed, neither of them had spoken much, at least not verbally. It was as if at that moment, no words were needed for each to convey to the other how they felt. The link between them may have been destroyed, but their love for each other created an understanding. There were many things that Demon wanted to ask, but first she wanted to care for her sister.

It had taken hours to get Angel cleaned up. Demon had brought a couple of large carry bags, filled with things that she knew would be needed to get Angel back to looking and feeling more human. One bag contained several bottles of water. Those she poured into the small washbasin in the corner of the cell. She had brought Angel over to it and began the long process of helping her to bathe from head to toe. She was now free of the IV, Sarah having returned before Demon arrived, to check on Angel and to remove the IV that had done its job in rehydrating her.

Once her body was finally cleaned of every trace of dirt and grime, Demon stood there, unable to tear her eyes away, as Angel dressed in the T-shirt and jeans that she'd brought for her. Now clean, it was horrifyingly clear just how thin and pale Angel was. Every bone stood out sharply beneath her skin, which in itself was a deathly bluish white. For a moment, Demon wondered if Sarah had done the right thing in removing the IV. It looked as if Angel needed days of fluid being pumped into her body, before she would begin looking better.

When Angel was dressed, she'd finally spoken. John had voiced his fears and concerns to Demon, when he'd told her that she would be allowed to see Angel. Demon smiled with relief. She'd been afraid that John had been right and that Angel had retreated from reality, mentally broken by everything that had happened to her. Demon should have known better. Angel was a fighter. She had quietly asked if Demon had a hairbrush with her. That moment had led to where they were now, cutting her hair. It hadn't taken long for Angel to give up her attempt to brush the knots and tangles from her hair. She had dropped her hand in her lap and looked up at Demon in defeat.

Demon had moved over to her, taken the brush awkwardly in her swollen right hand and tried to brush the matted hair out. The brush kept snagging in the hair, and Demon could see Angel tensing at the pain it caused. With reluctance, Demon admitted that there was no way the knots and tangles were going to be brushed out. She had put the brush down and moved round so that she could face Angel

"There's only one way these tangles are coming out," said Demon, keeping her voice as calming as possible. For a moment, she thought Angel would protest. She'd never been vain about her appearance, but she'd always taken pride in her hair. Instead, Angel nodded, raising a hand to touch Demon, her voice soft and shaky.

"It's OK, I know. If you have scissors in one of those bags..." Angel's voice trailed off. For a moment they remained there just looking at each other, then Demon moved to one of her bags and reached in, bringing out a pair of scissors. When she turned back around, Angel was sitting on one of the chairs supplied for visitors. Demon walked over and placed a hand on Angel's shoulder.

"Are you sure?" Angel nodded. Demon took a deep breath and hoped that she would be able to get rid of the matted hair without having to cut it too short.

Hope seemed to have paid off this time. Demon had managed to cut away all the tangles and knots without ending up with a buzz cut. Although it was considerably shorter now, it fell in a shaggy soft style that framed Angel's face. Demon turned Angel around to face her and had to admit, it gave her sister an almost elfin appearance. She smiled and ran her left hand through Angel's hair, brushing it back and styling it slightly.

"Well, I'm never going to win any awards for hair styling, but it's not too bad. In fact, I think it suits you," said Demon with a gentle smile. Angel didn't say anything, and Demon watched as she moved to look in the small mirror by the washbasin. She hoped that Angel would feel the same way about her hair as she did.

Angel stared at her reflection in the mirror, taking in what was left of her hair. She saw Demon in the mirror, moving to stand behind her and their eyes met for a moment, before Angel went back to looking at her reflection. She lifted her hand and tentatively touched her hair and her gaunt features, then tears welled up in her eyes. When she spoke, her voice was filled with pain. "Oh God, what's happened to me?"

Demon took hold of her shoulders and turned her around, pulling her into a warm comforting hug. "It'll grow back, darling. Honestly." Angel pulled away and shook her head.

"Not my hair. I'm not talking about that." Demon stood for a moment as Angel buried her face in her hands, wondering if now was the time to get to the questions she desperately needed to ask her sister.

Angel looked up as Demon took hold of her hand. "Do you want to talk about it, Angel?" Demon watched as Angel closed her eye. When she opened them, she nodded. Demon smiled softly and led Angel over to the bed, where they both sat down. Still holding her sister's hand, Demon hesitated, then softly asked the question foremost on her mind.

"Angel, where is Nikarran? Why hasn't he been taking care of you?"

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Angel's heart froze mid-beat. For a long moment, she was unable to find her voice. She should have been expecting this question. How could she tell her sister that her long time and trusted friend was dead? Murdered because of her.

Demon watched Angel's face, seeing pain flicker in her eyes. "He's gone," was all that Angel could say. She wanted to tell Demon the truth, but the words stuck in her throat.

Demon frowned. "What are you saying, Angel? Did Nikarran abandon you?"

Angel remained silent and pulled her hands out of Demon's, clasping them tightly together in her lap.

"How could he?" Snapped Demon. "I entrusted you to him. He promised me that he would never leave you, that he would look after you as if you were his own!" Demon stood up and paced in front of Angel, her icy mask slipping. "Bastard! If I ever get my hands on him..."

A strangled sound of desperation escaped Angel's tight throat. "Please! I don't want to talk about it!"

The anguish in Angel's voice brought Demon to a stand still, and she rushed back to sit by her sister's side, taking her hands gently. "I'm sorry, Angel. If I'd known... Gods, this is all my fault!" Angel's head jerked up at Demon's words.

"No! It's not. Everything that has happened to me, and anything that is going to happen, is my fault. No one else is to blame but me." Demon opened her mouth to deny it, but Angel stopped her by abruptly standing and pulling away to stand with her back toward Demon, hugging her arms around herself. She stood there as the minutes passed away, trying to pull herself together. It took an enormous effort, because all she wanted to do was to hide away inside herself again, to switch off to everything that had happened and was going to happen. But she couldn't do that. In the hours she'd spent alone in the cell since Gideon's visit, she'd begun to come back to reality despite herself, and she realized that there was no escaping the facts. She was going to have to face whatever was to come. Angel sighed and turned back towards Demon, who was watching her with concern, but respecting the fact that she needed to get her thoughts under control before she was ready to talk. Moving over to the bed, Angel sat, then finally broke the long silence.

"I... I need to know Demon..." Angel paused and swallowed nervously. She was still wary and unsure if Gideon really was who he said he was. She let herself believe that it was Gideon who'd married Demon and who had visited her earlier, and she had to ask about the man she'd mistaken him for. "Lucas?" For a moment, Demon didn't say a word, but the expression on her face was enough to tell Angel that something bad had happened. Panic welled up, but Demon spoke quickly.

"As far as we know, Lucas is alive. But he escaped from the Excalibur before Matthew could deliver him to the authorities."

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Demon immediately cursed herself for saying it so bluntly, as she saw fear wash over Angel's face.

"Oh my God! He's out there? He's going to come after me and kill me for what I did!"

Demon took Angel firmly by her shoulders and held her still. "Calm down, Angel. I won't let that happen. I'll never let Lucas hurt you again!" She was taken aback as Angel started laughing, an empty, near hysterical sound.

"You don't know Lucas like I do, Demon. I betrayed him. He'll never forgive me for that. One day, he'll take his revenge, and he'll be unstoppable." Demon was at a loss. In her heart, she knew that Angel was right but she didn't understand what Angel meant about betraying Lucas. She suspected that it had something to do with when Lucas was captured, and that Angel had been the one who sent Matthew the message. For a moment, her heart contracted painfully at the thought of Matthew. But she shook him out of her head. He was the last person she wanted to think about. [I hate him, I do... I must... how can I not...] She focused her attention back on Angel.

"Maybe you should start at the beginning, Angel. If you can. Please, I need to know what happened to you with Lucas, and I know you don't want to, but please tell me how you ended up in this state. Can



you do that, Angel?" Angel nodded, then taking a deep shaky breath, she began to tell Demon everything she could about what had happened since the day when Lucas had taken her away from Eriadne.

When Angel got to the part describing what had happened with the man who had sold Lucas his ship, a cold rage and hatred filled Demon. She wouldn't have been surprised if at that moment the entire population of Mars felt what she did. She clamped down on her emotions, preventing herself from projecting what she felt. She became nauseated as Angel explained that Lucas had sent her there as a test of her loyalty, and she knew if she ever saw Lucas Buck again, there would be no accounting for her actions.

Demon sat in silence, as Angel went on to describe the days that had followed and her discovery of what Lucas was planning to do. When Angel got to the part about how she'd sent the message warning Gideon about Lucas, love and pride overwhelmed her. She knew that it must have taken an almost unimaginable amount of courage to do what Angel had done. If Lucas had found out... Demon couldn't even allow herself to think about how different the outcome of that day might have been. Angel went on to tell her about the two days on board the ship, but she suspected that Angel held back on telling her everything that had happened. She had a feeling about what it was. She could see it in Angel's eyes. She wanted to find out how Angel felt about Lucas now, apart from the obvious fear, but decided it could wait until Angel had finished her story.

Angel continued, often times pausing as she described how she'd been living on Mars, finding it difficult to tell Demon how she'd had to steal to survive. This was the only time that Demon interrupted. "I don't understand, Lily's jewels... they should have provided you with enough money to live off for a very long time. Unless... did Nikarran steal them when he ran off?" Demon's tone was bitter and angry, and Angel rushed to defend Nikarran as best she could.

"No, he didn't." Angel went on, explaining how and why the money had run out so quickly, about her lack of knowledge in dealing with money in this time. She told Demon about living in The Place of Lost Souls, and about how she became a thief. She talked for ages, with Demon only occasionally asking a question, until finally Angel came to the end. How she had seen her and Gideon in the street, and had followed them, had overheard that they were going to get married, and how she had sneaked into the church so that she could watch the wedding.

"I'm so sorry, Demon. I've caused trouble between you and Gideon. Oh God, I shouldn't have gone to the Church. If I'd stayed away like I should have, I wouldn't have ruined your wedding, and Gideon wouldn't have caught me!"

Demon stopped her by shaking her head. "No, it's not your fault. You had every right to be there. I blame Matthew. I know he made a promise, but he didn't have to do it like that. I'll never forgive him for doing this to you!" Angel reached out and put her arms around her sister and hugged her, and after a while she let go and looked Demon in the eyes.

"No, it's not the Captain's fault." Angel cut Demon off before she could say anything. "No, it's not. I'm where I am because I... I caused the loss of an innocent life. And I deserve whatever punishment is coming to me."

Demon shook her head vehemently "No, you don't. You didn't know that bringing back Lucas would cause Dureena's baby to die, did you?" When Angel remained silent, Demon asked the question again a little more forcefully this time. "Did you?"

Angel started crying again and shook her head "No! Oh God, Demon if I'd known what the cost was, I'd never have done it. NEVER!"

Demon took her face between her hands and looked at her sister desperately. "Well then, you don't deserve to be punished for a crime you didn't commit."

Angel pulled her face away from Demon's hands, and stood up. "Yes I do. I still played a part. I should have known that bringing Lucas back wasn't that simple. I even thought that it couldn't be as easy as Lucas said. But I was so wound up in having him back, so selfish in wanting him, that I pushed my doubts aside and didn't take time to research it. And because of that, a baby is dead! I deserve to be punished. Gideon is right to have arrested and charged me, because I *am* to blame, not just because of that spell, but because I was the one who brought Lucas into our lives in the first place. None of this would have happened if I hadn't been so jealous and selfish in trying to make Gideon mine!" Angel stopped and breathed deeply before letting out a heavy and shaking sigh.

Demon was stunned at Angel's flood of words. Angel was blaming herself and she wasn't about to let her take all the blame. She moved off the bed to stand in front of Angel. "No. You're not entirely to blame Angel. I played a part too. I should never have asked you for Matthew. He was yours..."

"NO!" Demon was startled by Angel's shout and blinked at her in surprise. "No, Demon, you had nothing to do with it. You didn't make me cast that love spell, I did that myself. I knew it was wrong, but I did it anyway!"

This time, it was Demon's turn to disagree. She had to get her sister to stop taking the blame for a death she didn't cause. In this frame of mind, she would get herself convicted despite her innocence.

"You are not to blame. Yes, you did wrong casting that spell, but you didn't mean for it to result in Lucas taking over Matthew. And ever since then, you were used and skillfully manipulated by that evil sonofabitch. Lucas is guilty of killing Dureena's baby, not you! You loved him, and he used that to get you to do what he wanted, not giving a damn about the consequences!" Demon paused. She had to remain cool and calm. Getting overly emotional wasn't going to show Angel that she was wrong. When she continued, her voice was calmer.

"Angel, you aren't to blame. In your heart, you know that. I've never known anyone who considers life as much of a precious thing as you do. I'm not going to let you take the blame for any part of that baby's death. Please, Angel, you have to accept your innocence and believe it. If you don't, you're not going to fight this charge, and you'll be found guilty. And I couldn't bear that. You'd be taken from us forever. Please?"

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Angel heard the desperation in Demon's voice, a sound she'd never heard from her sister before. Demon was always so assured and calm. Angel had to admit that the thought of being mind wiped and never seeing her sisters again terrified her. She didn't know if she would ever be able to believe in her lack of guilt for what had happened or forgive herself, but in her heart, deep down, she knew that Demon was right. She didn't deserve to be found guilty for this crime and that small part gave her the courage to agree. "All right. I'll fight the charge. With you by my side, I'll fight it."

Demon laughed with relief and took her sister into her arms, holding onto her frail body. "It's going to be all right, Angel. I'll find a lawyer, a good one, and we *will* get you acquitted. I'm not going to lose you again." Angel held onto Demon and prayed that she was right, that everything would be all right,

but she couldn't help thinking that nothing would ever be right again. Too much had happened, and she felt a need to try and repair one of those things, the breach that she knew now existed between her sister and Gideon. Angel pushed Demon away. "There's something I'd like you to do, Demon."

Demon smiled. "Anything..."

Angel nodded "I don't want you to let what has happened here come between you and Gideon." As Demon opened her mouth to protest, Angel raised her hand. "No, listen to me. I could see yesterday how much you love him, and how much he loves you. Don't hold against him something he had to do. He honored a promise. That's something to be admired, not punished. Forgive him, Demon, and hold onto him. Take it from someone who's never had even a fraction of what you have with Gideon. Don't let it go for anything."

Demon seemed taken aback. "I don't understand how you can be so forgiving and understanding, Angel. I wish I could, but I'm too angry with him right now to do anything but stay the hell away from him."

Angel sighed. Demon might have thought that she'd forgiven Gideon, but that wasn't true. She felt as betrayed by him as she'd felt by Lucas, when she had learned of the price for bringing him back. Gideon must hate her to have been so determined to arrest her, before even trying to find out if she was as guilty as he thought. And she was hurt and angry with him for more reasons than she wanted to think about at the moment. But despite her feelings, she loved her sister, and her happiness meant everything to her. She knew it would break Demon's heart if she lost Gideon because of this. She wanted to try and get her sister to give Gideon a second chance.

Before she spoke, she suddenly realized that since Demon had arrived, she'd gone from someone who had been close to disappearing into a fog inside her mind, to someone thinking more rationally than she had done in months, and she knew it was because of having her sister there. Just Demon's presence gave her strength and hope that maybe, just maybe, everything would be all right.

"I understand Demon. But just give it some time before you do anything to walk away from the man you love."

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Demon took a moment to think about it, looking down at her bare left hand, knowing that it was too late, that she'd already walked away. Her right hand still throbbed with pain, from when she'd hit Matthew, and she was deeply ashamed of her loss of control at that moment. John had told her how badly she'd hurt Matthew with that blow, making her even more ashamed. Whether she forgave him or not, was irrelevant. She knew that he could never forgive her the emotional and physical pain she must have caused him, but Angel didn't need to know that. Demon nodded. "I promise I'll think about it." That was certainly no lie. She'd spend the rest of her life thinking about what she'd lost.

They stood in silence for a while, then Demon spoke, remembering what her sister had said about love. She needed to ask about Lucas. She knew it wasn't going to be easy for Angel to talk about it, but she needed to find out how her sister really felt about him, because those feelings could play a big part in how Angel would get through the trial. Many questions would be asked about him, and it would be a good idea to be sure of what Angel would say and how she would react. Something in her feelings towards Lucas could sway a court either way, for her or against her. Knowing her feelings would help a lawyer prevent her from saying anything incriminating.

"Angel, I know this is going to be hard for you to do, but I need to know..." Demon trailed off, a little unsure about asking. Angel seemed to have come out of whatever shell she'd been in, but Demon was afraid that making her talk about Lucas would drive her back.

"What is it, Demon?" Asked Angel, with a small frown of concern.

Demon sucked in her breath, then slowly let the air out of her lungs and bit the bullet. "Lucas. I need to know how you feel about Lucas. I know you're afraid of him, but there is more than just fear. I still can't read your feelings as I can other people's, but I can tell that much."

She watched as Angel looked as if she was going to throw up. The last thing she obviously wanted to do was talk to her sister about Lucas. She shook her head. "No. Please, I don't want to talk about him." She tried to move away, but Demon gently grabbed hold of her wrist, stopping her. Angel looked at her desperately. "Please. I'd much rather talk about Lily and Ilas and your babies. I want to...."

Demon interrupted her. "I know, and we will talk about them, but first let's get this out of the way."

"Why do you want to know about Lucas?" Angel's question was pleading. Demon explained her concerns, and again gently insisted that Angel tell her. For a moment, Demon thought Angel was going to refuse, and felt regret at having to ask her sister to do this. Then she saw Angel trembling and her shoulders slumped in defeat.

"OK, I'll tell you." Pulling out of Demon's hold, Angel moved to the bed and sat down. She waited as Demon pulled the chair up and sat on it in front of her.

"Take your time. I know this is hard."

Angel nodded, then taking a deep breath, she told her sister what she felt when it came to Lucas. "I fear him. I hate him... and... I love him" Demon sucked in her breath sharply.

Demon had suspected as much, but it was still a shock to hear it. She knew that she should have stopped herself from asking her next question, but it was out before she had time to think about it. "How can you still love him? After everything he's done. How?"

Angel closed her eyes tightly before opening them again. Her tone was anguished and confused. "I don't know! I wish to God I could explain it, but I can't. He strikes fear in me. I know he's out there somewhere. By now, he must know that it was me who betrayed him and one day he'll make me pay for that, and I know beyond a doubt that whatever he does, it will be a fate worse than death. I fear him because I know that just because I ruined his plans, he won't give up on your son, and that one day he'll return to claim him. And that scares me more than him making me pay for betraying him. Because I know that you and Gideon will die before you'll let him take your son, and Lucas will have no qualms about killing you if he has to, to get what he wants." Angel stopped, as her throat tightened up with a rush of emotions, and she had to clear her throat before she continued.

"I hate him, because of the threat he is to the people I love. I don't care about myself, but I do care about you and the others. Lucas has no conscience. No heart. He'll destroy and hurt whoever he has to, to get what he thinks is rightfully his. He hurt me more times than I care to remember. I hate him because he coldly destroyed our link, and I've never felt more alone and vulnerable. I no longer have my telekinetic abilities, and because of that, Smith nearly killed me, something that wouldn't have happened if Lucas hadn't wanted to test my loyalty. But I hate him most because he never loved me the way I love him!" Angel couldn't continue as she burst out crying, burying her face in her hands.

Demon moved to the chair and leaned forward to hold Angel as she cried. She silently cursed herself for making her sister talk about Lucas. She had opened a raw wound even wider, causing her sister more pain. "I'm sorry, Angel. It's all right, we don't have to talk about this anymore." She was surprised to feel Angel shaking her head and pull away.

"No, you wanted to know..." She gulped down a few ragged breaths and went on, "I know how you feel about Lucas. I don't blame you, and I know you can't understand how I can love him still. I know that he's evil. I tried to deny it, even succeeded in convincing myself that he wasn't as bad as he seemed to the rest of you, and that he loved me. But I know now that's not true. Despite all he's done, I can't deny how I feel about him in my heart. Demon, he's in my blood. When I betrayed him, you have no idea how close I came to warning him. Even though I didn't want him to hurt you, I was terrified that Gideon would kill him, and I couldn't bear the thought of him dying. Ever since that awful night, not a day goes by when I don't miss him, and wish he were here, when I don't dream about being in his arms. I wish I could stop loving him but God forgive me, I can't!"

Neither Angel nor Demon spoke for a long time, each trying to deal with the emotions stirred up by talking about Lucas. Angel was trying to stop herself from breaking down, while Demon was trying to rein in the hatred she felt for Lucas. No, she couldn't understand how her sister could love someone like Lucas, a man who had caused her nothing but heartache and misery. She hated him now more than ever.

"I'm so sorry, Angel." Demon wanted to say more to comfort her sister, to try and take the hurt away, but she knew nothing but time could do that.

Angel nodded and smiled weakly "I know..." She shrugged. There was nothing else she could say about Lucas. "Please, can we talk about something happier? We've done nothing but talk about the bad things. And there is so much I want you to tell me about Lily, Ilas and the babies. I don't even know your son's name."

It took Demon a moment to gather her wits, but she saw that she needed to tell Angel something happy and upbeat. Clearing her throat, she began to tell her everything she wanted to know.

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It was well into the early hours of the following day when Demon leaned back in her chair and rubbed her sore breasts. "I'm sorry, Angel, I have to go. I should have fed Marcus hours ago."

Angel looked mortified. "Oh Demon, don't tell me that he's been waiting all this time to be fed! The poor darling must be starving!"

Demon smiled. "Don't worry, Lily has taken care of him for me. He's fast asleep and dreaming about breakfast. But I'm full of milk, and if I don't get rid of some of it soon, I think my tits are going to explode!" She started to laugh, and Angel couldn't help but join her. Soon they were sprawled across the bed, laughing helplessly, each setting the other off again every time one of them calmed.

When they finally were able to stop, Angel looked at Demon with tears in her eyes. "You know I haven't laughed like that since... Well, since it was just the four of us on Eriadne."

Demon hugged her tightly. "You know, there are times when I wish that the Excalibur had never come to our home, and that we'd never met any of them. If it weren't for Marcus, I could almost wish that

I'd never laid eyes on Matthew Gideon. He's caused us so much pain..." Her voice broke as her control finally deserted her, and she wept into Angel's shoulder.

Angel held her sister gently, waiting for the sobbing to subside. She whispered, "Don't blame him, Demon. It's not his fault. He loves you so much, please try to forgive him."

When Demon regained her composure, she sat up straight and looked into Angel's eyes. "You know what? I'm just like you. I know that I should hate him, but I can't. I love him, Angel, and I love our son. I just don't see how..." She bit her lip and stopped herself. "Never mind. I've got to go. I'll be back as early as I can get here tomorrow. I'll leave a message for Max asking him if he can find a good lawyer and send him here." She stood and hugged her sister one last time before leaving the jail cell.

Angel curled up on her bed, alone, but content. At last, the future seemed to hold some hope of improvement.

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## **The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble**

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