

The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 4: Crossroads

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Matthew and Demon have a lot of making up to do...

Chapter 1

The first thing Gideon saw, as he entered the room, was Deborah sprawled across the bed. She still wore the plain black dress she'd had on in court, and her hair was still braided. Her head was buried into a pillow that she held so tight to her face that Gideon wondered how she didn't suffocate. Or perhaps that was what she was trying to do. Her whole body was vibrating with the force of the sobs that wracked her body. He started to move toward the bed when another wave of despair hit him, this time almost knocking him off his feet as it crashed down on him.

Gideon ran to the bed and pulled Deborah into his arms, holding her tightly against his chest, rocking her, stroking her hair, and kissing her head as she wept bitterly. After a moment, her head came up and she looked at him, her eyes widening as she saw who was holding her.

"Ma... Matthew?" His name came out in a hiccup. Gideon looked into her eyes, reddened from all the tears she'd shed, and smiled gently at her.

"Who did you think it was?" Deborah buried her head in his shoulder and sobbed, her whole body shaking. He continued to rock her, grimacing as her waves of grief washed over him, trying to hang onto his sense of relief that she hadn't pulled away, hadn't fought him as he held her. Gideon kissed the top of her head again, and whispered reassurances to her, telling her that he was there, that he loved her, that he needed and wanted her, that he was never going to let her go again.

Eventually, Deborah's sobbing subsided and she lifted her head again. This time, she managed a few words, her voice raw and broken from crying. "I thought you'd left me. I thought you didn't want me

any more."

Gideon swallowed the lump in his own throat and smiled down at her again. "Well, that was dumb. You can't get rid of me that easily." He could feel his own eyes filling as she tried a tentative smile, then buried her head into his shoulder again.

Her voice was muffled as it emerged, but he could just make out her words. "I'm so sorry, Matthew. I shouldn't have lost my temper. I hurt you and..." Deborah started to cry again.

Gideon rocked her gently for a while, then lifted her face so he could look at her. "And I'm sorry, too. I should have spoken to you before I called Security, explained why I had to..." Deborah's right hand came up to touch his lips, stopping his words.

"I know why you felt you had to do that. I wish you hadn't, but I understand." Her voice started to wobble as she forced more words out. "I tried to hate you for it, but I couldn't. I love you too much." The love in her eyes almost broke his heart. Gideon reached for the hand that had touched his mouth, intending to kiss it, but as his fingers closed around it, Deborah flinched. He looked down at her hand, noticing the bruising and swelling for the first time.

"What have you done to your hand? Is this...?" Gideon stopped as he realized how she'd injured it and took a deep breath before continuing. "I asked Luke to take care of this. Why hasn't he fixed it? I knew that you must have hurt it when you hit me." Deborah buried her head in his shoulder and didn't speak. He lifted her head back again, so he could look her in the eyes. "Deborah? You could have broken something. Why haven't you had it seen to?"

She tried to avoid his gaze, but Gideon held her chin firmly. Her eyes filled with tears again, as she whispered, "I shouldn't lose control like that. If I don't suffer the consequences of my actions, how will I ever learn not to do it? It should hurt, Matthew. I hurt you, I should suffer too."

Gideon looked at Deborah's red swollen eyes and runny nose and started to laugh softly. "You are a complete nut, do you know that?" He pulled her face close enough to kiss her gently. "But I didn't know that you were a masochist, too." He smiled lasciviously as he said, "If you like that sort of thing, we could try a little light bondage sometime."

Deborah started to smile, then her face broke up and tears started to flow again. Gideon pulled her head back into his shoulder and held her tightly, waiting for her to calm. She was still sending waves of pain and misery, but their strength was diminishing. He could feel that she was still hurting badly, but his presence had eased her pain. When she stopped sobbing again, he moved his hands to her arms and tried to push her back gently, saying, "Let me get a regenerator, and we can fix that hand," but she clung to him, shaking her head violently.

"Don't go!" It was almost a wail as Deborah hung onto him. Gideon put his arms around her again, holding her against his chest.

"OK, we'll do that later." He slid down the bed, still holding her, until they were lying down, arms wrapped tightly around each other, Deborah's head on his shoulder and her body pressed tightly against his. They lay quietly for a while, each taking comfort from the presence of the other, Deborah's waves of despair gradually fading. When she hadn't sent anything for a few moments, Gideon again put his hand under her chin and lifted her face, so he could look at her.

"Deborah, we're going to fix all this mess, somehow. We're going to get Angel off these stupid charges.

There's no way that she would have hurt Nikarran..." Deborah's face broke up again at the sound of that name, and Gideon grunted with the pain she projected; guilt and grief equally balanced in her sending. He soothed her again until she quieted, then asked gently, "I understand the grief. I know he was your friend, but why the guilt? Why do you feel so guilty about this?"

Deborah had buried her head back into his chest, so Gideon couldn't see her face as she choked out her reply. "It's all my fault. He would never have been on Mars, if I hadn't asked him to take care of Angel. He would still be on Eriadne, with his daughter and her family. I asked him to leave them and his home, and he did it. He did it for me. And now he's dead..." Another wave of guilt escaped her.

Gideon kissed the top of her head. "He made his own choice Deborah. He could have said no. It was his decision, not yours."

Suddenly, Deborah started to struggle, pulling herself away from him. until she sat upright on the bed looking down at him. "But that's just it. He didn't have a choice. He couldn't say 'no'. He never could say 'no' to me because..." She trailed off and bit her lip.

Gideon reached up and ran his thumb along her cheekbone, then finished her sentence for her. "Because he loved you."

He watched as Deborah's eyes widened with surprise, before she whispered, "How did you know?"

Gideon explained about the time when Lucas had kidnapped Angel, how Nikarran had helped him get Deborah to the infirmary, how he'd left their rooms in such a hurry that he'd arrived barefoot and without a shirt, and how Nikarran had brought his boots and shirt to him.

"As I was getting dressed, he stood at the foot of your bed, looking down at you as you lay unconscious. Nikarran was good at hiding his feelings, but at that moment it was obvious. He was deeply in love with you. I felt sorry for him and couldn't help but admire him. His attitude to me was always friendly and supportive. I don't know if I could have been that generous in his position. To watch you fall in love with another man..." Gideon sat up and pulled his wife back into his arms, then fell back on the bed, whispering, "I don't think I could have stood it. But he did. He was a good man, Deborah, but he had a mind of his own and made his own decisions. No matter how he felt about you, he could still have refused when you asked him to help Angel."

Gideon could feel Deborah shaking her head against his chest, and another wave of misery washed over him. "You don't understand..."

He hugged her hard. "Then make me understand. Tell me why he had to do as you asked."

She pulled herself upright again and looked down at him, her face full of sadness. "If I tell you, then you might not think that Nikarran was a good man, but he was, and I don't want you to think otherwise."

"Tell me."

Deborah sniffed back her tears and started her story. "You remember I once told you that when we were found by the Brakiri, we had to take over?" Gideon nodded. "But I never told you why." She went on to explain that it had taken the Brakiri years to break through all the various protections that the Vorlon had left around the castle on Eriadne, one generation after the other, determined to find what secrets were hidden inside. Around six years earlier, the Brakiri had finally broken through to the

throne room where Deborah and her sisters had lain in their stasis tubes. The Brakiri had opened the tubes and taken the women out.

"Have you ever been in stasis, Matthew?" Gideon shook his head, not wanting to interrupt her. "When you wake up, it's very gradual. First your hearing comes back, then your eyesight and so on. Actual control over your body is very slow to return. When I opened my eyes the first thing I saw was Nikarran. He was kneeling between my legs. Two other Brakiri held my ankles apart, and a third held my wrists above my head. It was pretty damned obvious what was going to happen next."

Gideon sat bolt upright on the bed, staring at Deborah in horror. "Oh no, please tell me they didn't..." He reached out to caress her face, anger building inside him as the implications of what she was telling him sank in. "If the bastard wasn't already dead, I'd kill him."

She reached out to touch his lips again, quieting him. "No, he didn't. He was stopped, as were the other Brakiri who were about to do the same thing to my sisters. By Angel. She saw what was happening and threw them off us. She couldn't move her body, but she could use her mind. She picked Nikarran up and threw him against the wall so hard that I heard his ribs crack from where I lay. Then she did the same with the other Brakiri who held Lily and Ilas, only getting rid of her own assailants last. When she'd finished, they were all unconscious, which gave us time to recover and be ready for them when they came round. Then we negotiated a way of living together. A deal that provided us with the help we needed to live in the castle and gave them access to the technology that was held there."

Deborah went on to explain how they'd learned to live together with the Brakiri, each supporting and helping the others, until the original bad start was overcome. "But Nikarran never forgave himself for what he'd been about to do. He always felt he owed me something for the distress he'd caused me at that time. So when I went to ask for his help, he had no choice but to agree. It was the only way he could repay me for what he'd done. And now he's dead, and it's my fault."

Gideon watched as Deborah's face broke up again and she started to cry, but this time it was a gentle weeping, not the heart rending sobs she'd given before. And now, she only sent waves of guilt and sadness, not the appalling despair she'd sent earlier. Somehow, telling the story had helped ease her burden. He held her tightly, stroking her head and her back, waiting for her tears to subside again, knowing there was nothing he could say to stop her blaming herself. All he could do was be there for her, until she cried herself out.

When Deborah quieted, Gideon took her left hand and pulled it to his mouth, kissing it gently. He held up her hand, so they could both see it and smiled. "I think something's missing, don't you?" He put her hand back on his chest and reached into his pocket, pulling out the two rings that had stayed with him every moment since he'd found them. Keeping his arm around her, Gideon reached around until he could pick up her hand again and slide the two rings onto her finger.

Deborah didn't move or respond, just watched him as he did it, then looked up into his face, her eyes full of hope. "Are you sure you want me back?"

Gideon smiled at her and caressed her face again. "Don't you ever listen to a thing I say? I love you, you nut. I want to spend the rest of my life with you." He leaned forward and kissed her gently, but she returned his kiss with passion, deepening it, opening her mouth and touching her tongue to his lips. Before he knew it, her hands were roaming his body, touching, stroking, pushing inside his T-shirt, her kisses moving down his neck onto his chest.

"Whoa! Hold on, we can't, not here..." Deborah's movements were becoming increasingly frantic as she

tried to remove his clothing, and Gideon grabbed her hands, trying to stop her. "Stop it. This isn't our room, wait until we get back downstairs..." But she wasn't listening. She struggled against his hold on her hands and got one hand free, then kept moving her mouth, now sucking his nipple where she'd managed to get his T-shirt pushed up to his neck.

"Deborah, please, don't..." Gideon groaned as Deborah's free hand made its way to his groin and started to rub his rapidly stiffening shaft. He gave up. "Oh, fuck it..." He rolled her onto her back, kissing her passionately, running his hands down the bare skin of her arms, across to her breasts, then down her belly to her legs. He slid one hand between her knees and started to stroke the skin of her inner thigh, slowly working his way upwards, moving in slow circles as his hand went higher.

Gideon frowned as he felt something hard strapped to her thigh, halfway between her knee and her hip. He stopped kissing her and looked down to where his hand was pressed between her legs, then pulled her skirt up to see what he'd felt. Deborah watched him closely as he found the knife she had strapped to her inner thigh. He looked up at her, puzzled. "What's that for? Why the hell are you wearing a knife there?"

Deborah looked worried then dropped her gaze, moving her mouth back to his neck, kissing and licking her way to his ear. "I didn't have anywhere else to put it, and I thought I might need it. Just unstrap it and forget it. I want you, Matthew. I want you now."

Gideon decided that now was not the time to tackle this, but that he'd definitely have it out with her later. He unstrapped the knife, then tried to lift her skirt further. But it was too tight, the hem of the skirt was narrower than Deborah's hips, and it wouldn't lift over them. Muttering to himself, he reached around her back and found the zipper to her dress. [Go over, tunnel under, go around, just get the job done,] he grinned to himself. Then the zipper stuck. It was no more than a few centimeters down her back, and there was no way he could get the dress off her with the zipper stuck where it was. He pulled harder but it wouldn't move.

"Uh, Deborah, can you get this thing off?"

Demon sat up and reached over her shoulders, trying to move the zipper, but it had stuck fast. Her face was a picture of frustration and unhappiness, when she realized that she was effectively trapped inside the dress and Matthew couldn't get her out of it. By now she had his pants undone, and she was desperate to have him inside her. Demon just wanted to cry again at the unfairness of it all. She had Matthew back in her bed, and he couldn't make love to her.

She was ready to scream her frustration, when Matthew gave her a wicked smile and pushed her back down onto the bed, climbing over her until he knelt above her knees. "Lie still. I hope you can live without the dress."

Demon watched as Matthew reached for the knife he'd placed on the bedside table and brought it down to the hem of her skirt. She felt her breathing accelerate as she realized what he was going to do, biting her lip to stop herself whimpering with excitement as Matthew slid the knife under her skirt and lifted it, slicing through the fabric. He put the knife to one side then looked at her lying beneath him, grinning his delight at what he planned next. Moving his hands down to the hem, he grabbed the cut edges, then pulled hard, ripping the dress apart from hem to neck.

Demon's breath was coming in short pants as Matthew moved his hands to her breasts, running his

fingers over the black lace of her bra, then sliding them down her sides until he reached the black lace panties she wore. He looked up at her face and smiled wickedly again. "I hope you don't mind losing these, too."

Matthew reached for the knife, and Demon stopped breathing as he slid it under the front of the bra. It was sharp enough to cut straight through the fabric, which fell apart under the pressure from her breasts. She watched as Matthew lowered his head then felt him take her nipple into his mouth, moaning her pleasure as he first licked and sucked at it, then took it gently between his teeth. Her breasts had become sensitive and full of milk during the hours since she'd fed Marcus, and she felt them start to leak under Matthew's attentions. He moved to the other nipple and lapped up the drops of milk, then gave that breast the same careful attention as he'd done the other.

Demon was losing herself in pleasure when she felt Matthew move away, and opened her eyes to look up at him. He'd picked up the knife again and moved it to her panties. Carefully slicing through each side, he brushed the fabric away from her, pulling the remnants out from under her and throwing them to the floor. He parted her legs and shifted until he was kneeling between them.

"Now I can see what I want." Matthew's head dropped between her legs, and Demon felt his mouth and tongue move around and inside her, lifting her closer to orgasm with every movement. Her hands were in his hair, stroking the softness of it, gripping it when he touched a sensitive part, then pulling his head away from her.

Demon looked down the length of her body at him and pleaded. "Please, Matthew. I want you inside me. Now."

She watched as Matthew again gave the wicked smile she loved so much. "I can do that." He pulled himself back up to kneel between her legs, but before he could move any further, Demon grabbed the knife from the bed where he'd left it and brought it close to his belly.

Gideon laughed nervously. The knife was a damn sight closer to his cock than he was comfortable with, and for one scary moment, he wondered whether Deborah had really forgiven him. Then she moved the tip of the knife to the bottom of his T-shirt and cut it. Flinging the knife on to the floor, she grabbed the bottom and ripped it apart in the same way as he'd ripped her dress.

Deborah grinned up at him, saying, "Sauce for the goose, Matthew."

Gideon leaned forward and tweaked her nipple. "Well, this is one goose who's gonna get well and truly stuffed."

They lay naked in each other's arms, relaxing in the aftermath of their passion. Gideon wondered idly if the shielding on the suite would have been strong enough to prevent every person in a ten kilometer radius becoming aroused. He'd worked Deborah up to a pitch where, when she reached climax, she'd projected it with a power and strength he'd never felt before. She'd taken him with her into a realm of pleasure like nothing he'd ever experienced. Gideon just hoped she didn't do it again too soon, as he wasn't sure his heart could take it.

He stroked her hair gently, then kissed her temple where it rested against his neck. "I think you should

wear your hair like this all the time when we make love."

Deborah snuggled down into his chest, kissing his shoulder, so he could feel her smile against his skin. "Why?"

"This is the first time I can remember when I haven't ended up with a mouthful of your hair." She chuckled softly and Gideon was about to speak again when he heard a very loud gurgling noise.

Deborah placed her hand over her stomach and looked up at him, embarrassed. "Sorry." It was followed by another equally loud rumble.

Gideon started to laugh. "What have you been eating to make those sort of noises?" He watched as she lowered her head and tucked it into his shoulder again, saying nothing. He pulled her chin back up so that she had to look at him. "Deborah? When did you last eat?"

Deborah shook her head loose from Gideon's grip and didn't answer. Rolling her over onto her back, and looking down at her, he made sure that this time she couldn't avoid his gaze. "When?"

Deborah flushed slightly as she said, "Yesterday."

"Yesterday, when?"

"Breakfast. I just haven't felt like eating since."

Gideon dropped his head and kissed her gently. "But you've been feeding Marcus haven't you?" She nodded. He smiled down at her as he shook his head. "What am I going to do with you? You really are a goose, you know. My beautiful goose."

Deborah reached up to run her fingers through his hair and smiled back. "But I can't be a goose. Geese lay, they don't get laid."

Gideon laughed and kissed her again, turning onto his back and pulling her back into his arms, with her head resting on his shoulder, then sighed deeply. "We'd better move. Magnusson told me to stay put downstairs, I really ought to go back there." Gideon felt, more than heard, a deep growl coming from his wife's chest. "What? Don't you like him?" Deborah shook her head, but didn't speak. "I don't think much of him myself, but he's supposed to be the best, so I guess we'll have to put up with him."

A sudden thought hit him and he grinned, pulling her chin up so he could see her face. "I am *really* looking forward to telling him that he can't draw up annulment papers now. If you want to get rid of me after this, it'll have to be divorce."

Deborah reached up to stroke his face and smiled maliciously. "As long as I can be there to see his face when you tell him." Gideon looked down at her, puzzled by her tone, but decided that was another thing he'd follow up later; for now they'd better get moving. He kissed her one last time then slid off the side of the bed, looking for his clothes. As he pulled on his pants, he turned back to see her lying back, stretched out on the bed, arms behind her head. The sight of Deborah's naked body, displayed like that just for him, made him want to climb straight back in with her and make love to her again. [Not now, get her downstairs and into your own bed first.]

Gideon bent to pick up the remnants of her dress and his T-shirt. "I hope you've got something else you can wear." Deborah nodded towards a chair where he saw her bag, still packed with her and Marcus'

clothes. Holding out his ripped T-shirt towards her, Gideon asked, "I don't suppose you packed any of my shirts did you?" She shook her head, still silent, so he asked, "What's the matter? Not speaking to me any more?"

Deborah knelt upright on the bed and held out her arms. Gideon went back and sat, leaning into her arms, resting his head on her shoulder. His hands caressed her back and her breasts as she held his head against her, running her fingers through his hair. He felt her kiss the top of his head gently, as she whispered, "I only want to say one thing right now, Matthew. I love you."

Gideon looked up and saw the love and passion in Deborah's face and knew that she would be able to feel his emotions. He kissed her neck then told her again how much he loved her. "But promise me one thing. Whatever happens, whatever I do or you feel, talk to me. Yell at me, throw things at me, hit me if you must, but don't walk out. Don't leave me again."

Gideon looked up into Deborah's face, seeing tears trickling down her cheeks. She whispered, "I promise, I'll never leave you."

He pulled her head down to kiss her gently, then sat upright. "OK, we need to get moving. I'll go and see if John can loan me a T-shirt. You get dressed."

Gideon walked into the living room of the suite, holding his torn T-shirt in his hand. At first, he thought that John had left, then he heard a groan. Walking over to the sofa that had its high back facing the bedroom door, he looked over to see Matheson lying there, stretched out flat. His eyes were closed and his face covered in a fine sheen of sweat. As Gideon's eyes traveled down John's body, trying to see if he were injured in some way, he raised his eyebrows when he saw what John had been doing.

John's pants were open and his hand was covering his now limp cock. But there was plenty of evidence on his belly that it hadn't been that way a short time before. Gideon took a rapid step backwards and cleared his throat noisily.

John shot upright on the sofa and looked over its back to where Gideon was standing. The look on John's face was causing Gideon real problems in keeping his own straight. He bit his lip firmly, then managed to choke out, "Everything OK, Lieutenant? Got everything in hand, have you?"

John glared at him, saying, "Oh, very funny," as his hands moved below the level of the sofa back. "I'll be back in a minute," he said as he fled the room, through the door to the bedroom on the far side.

Gideon walked round the sofa, checked to make sure there was no damp patch and sat, trying very hard not to laugh, but failing miserably. A few moments later, John emerged from the bedroom, wearing a different pair of pants, back to his usual crisp, pristine self.

"Very funny, Matthew. You should try being on the receiving end sometime."

Gideon couldn't resist. "Come again?" He looked up quizzically, but lost control and broke down into laughter before John could respond.

A cushion hit his head and almost knocked him off the sofa. "Hey! That's assaulting a senior officer! I could have you court-martialed for that." Another cushion hit him. "OK! I surrender. Just don't get too cocky." He grinned up at where John stood, glowering down at him.

John started to bite his lip, then a slow grin spread across his face. "Damn it, Matthew, do you have any idea what it does to innocent bystanders when you get her going? When Demon starts sending like that... well, it's irresistible. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

Gideon was laughing so hard he fell back on the sofa, gasping for air, eventually pulling himself together enough to respond, "And I bet you didn't need fifteen minutes to do it!"

John looked puzzled for a moment, then remembered the joke he'd made at Gideon's expense. He grinned. "Touché."

Gideon laughed even harder. "I've never been an 'innocent bystander' when she lets rip. I've always been sort of... intimately involved." He almost choked the words out. "And I've no intention of changing that either. Hell, when she lets go like that, I'm normally so close to the edge that I'm happy to go with her."

He pulled himself upright, getting his laughter under control, and continued, holding out his torn T-shirt. "She got a bit carried away. Do you have a shirt I can borrow to get back to our rooms? Oh, and if Luke has left his bag here, can I borrow a regenerator? I need to fix Deborah's hand."

John stood to go to the bedroom. "Of course. We tried to persuade her to let Luke treat her, but she wouldn't let him near her. You sure you don't want me to call Luke? He could be over in a minute?"

"No, don't bother him, we'll be fine." Gideon stood and waited until John returned with a T-shirt and the regenerator. He took them in his left hand and held out his right. "And thanks for calling me. We've still got a few things to iron out, but if you hadn't called... well, I don't know where we'd be now. And thanks for looking after her and Marcus." John shook his hand and Gideon turned towards the bedroom, then stopped. Turning back, he grinned at John. "Just one more favor? Do you think you could hang onto Marcus for the rest of the night? We are supposed to be on honeymoon, after all."

John laughed and told Gideon to get out and take his wife with him.

Gideon pulled the T-shirt John had loaned him over his head as he went back to the bedroom, still smiling. When he entered the room, he found that Deborah had dressed, putting on a black dress in a stretch material, which left her shoulders bare, clung to her breasts, waist and hips, then flared out into a wide skirt. [No chance of her getting stuck inside that one then,] he grinned to himself. She was pushing things into her bag as he entered, favoring her injured right hand. Gideon walked over and put his arm around Deborah's waist, pulling her back to the bed, where he got her to sit, while he knelt in front of her.

Without saying a word, he picked up her right hand and began to run the regenerator over it, watching as the bruising and swelling faded, remembering when he'd first met her, how she had done this for him. When all signs of the injury had vanished, he turned off the regenerator and looked up into her face, bringing her hand to his mouth to kiss it gently. Gideon smiled as he said, "Well, now that's fixed, maybe could talk about the bondage thing?"

Deborah grinned and pulled her hand from his, reaching up to caress his face. "And just who gets tied up? You or me?"

Gideon grabbed her hand and kissed it again, smiling. "I thought maybe we could take it in turns." He

stood abruptly, pulling her to her feet and hugging her closely. "But we can continue these negotiations downstairs." Still holding onto her hand he reached across and picked up her bag. "Anything else?"

Deborah smiled. "Oh, nothing major. Just our son."

Gideon laughed. "All taken care of. John, Luke and Lily are going to look after him for us tonight. We get to honeymoon."

Demon lay with her head on Matthew's shoulder, her arm across his chest, and one leg wrapped tightly around his. On returning to their rooms, they'd quickly undressed each other and made love on the floor of the living room, on the sofa, in the shower and finally in bed. She moved her head to look up at him as he lay with one arm around her shoulders, the other reaching across to gently play with her breast. Matthew's eyes were closed, but Demon knew that he was awake. [Unless he's learned to do that in his sleep,] she mused as she looked down to where he was rolling her nipple between his fingers. She kissed his neck and watched as his eyes opened and he smiled down at her.

"Not again. Not yet, anyway. Give me some time to recover, will you?"

Demon chuckled and kissed him again. "OK, you've got five minutes. Is that enough?"

Matthew sat up and rolled her onto her back, kissing her thoroughly. He eventually pulled back and said, "You'll be lucky if I recover in five hours after that last session. *My* main gun takes a little longer than a minute to recharge. You're determined to have me limping back to the Excalibur, aren't you?"

He collapsed back onto the pillows, and she quickly repositioned herself with her head on his shoulder again. After a brief silence, Demon sighed deeply. "Matthew, we have to talk. What are we going to do about these charges that have been brought against Angel? What about her identity papers?"

Matthew explained what he'd arranged with Galen. Demon stiffened at the mention of that name, then felt Matthew shift his hand to stroke her hair. "I know you don't like him much, but he does want to do whatever he can to help Angel. He had his reasons for what he did in helping Lucas escape, and I can't tell you what they were." He shifted his hand to her chin, so that she had to look up at him. "But believe me that the last thing Galen would ever want to do is to hurt Angel. He's pretty much besotted with her and will do whatever he can to help."

He went on to describe what Magnusson was doing, how he'd told Gideon to stay in the hotel, then what Galen had planned for Carr, as revenge for her behavior. Demon couldn't help but laugh and her attitude towards Galen softened a little. [But just a little,] she thought. If he were willing to help Angel in the way Matthew described, perhaps he wasn't all bad. She was much more suspicious of Magnusson's motives in telling Gideon not to leave their suite. Demon had told Angel that if Magnusson didn't keep his hands to himself, then he'd lose fingers, and she'd worn a knife that day so she could follow through on that threat if necessary. She considered telling Matthew about her suspicions, but decided that they needed Magnusson for the moment. Matthew might well try to kill the lawyer, when he heard what she suspected.

Demon lay quietly, thinking for a while and then asked, "And what do we do if... when Angel is cleared of these charges? Where will she go? Matthew, I can't leave her behind on Mars, and I can't ask you to take her on board your ship. But I won't take her back to Eriadne and abandon her there either. Oh Matthew, what am I going to do about her?" She was becoming increasingly agitated as she

considered the options, none of which seemed good. Demon had taken on responsibility for her sister when Angel was only fifteen years old. She wasn't about to walk away from that responsibility now. She wouldn't--she couldn't--abandon her sister.

Gideon pulled his wife more tightly into his arms. "Why do you say that you can't ask me to take her on board? If you need her to be with you, then I'll find a way."

His heart sank at the thought of it. How the hell was he going to find an excuse to bring Angel onto his ship? And even if he succeeded, how was he going to cope with her being there? Angel had the ability to make him lose his temper faster than almost anyone alive and he had exactly the same effect on her. The Excalibur might be a big ship, but was it big enough to contain the explosion that putting him and Angel in proximity would produce? And how would Deborah react when that explosion occurred? As it would, eventually.

Even if he could prevent himself from fighting with her, could he keep his hands off her? Gideon knew that a big part of his irritation with Angel arose from his attraction to her. Of all the women he'd ever known, only Deborah aroused him more. Putting Angel within reach was putting the cat a damn sight too close to the canary; he just wasn't sure which role he played. Gideon half smiled as he remembered an occasion when he'd felt as if he'd sprouted yellow feathers, but then he remembered the library and the orchard. He'd taken the initiative in both of those encounters. He fought hard to suppress the wave of guilt that swept through him, when he thought about those incidents, but it was too late.

"Matthew? Are you all right? Oh, please don't feel guilty about this! I know that you'll do your best to help Angel. It's not your fault that Carr double crossed you and brought up these stupid charges."

Gideon hugged Deborah tightly again, holding her head to his chest so she couldn't see his face. His guilt increased a notch, when he realized that she'd wrongly attributed his emotion to what had happened on Mars. He gave quiet thanks that she was an empath not a telepath.

"Deborah, I'll find a way to take Angel with us, but for the moment I'm not sure how. Maybe I can think of a use for her telekinetic skills. Teeks are pretty rare. I'm sure I can justify why I need one, somehow."

Deborah took him by surprise by sitting up abruptly, kneeling beside him on the bed and frowning as she looked down at him. "Didn't you know? Angel doesn't have those powers any more. When Lucas broke her link..." he watched as she paused and swallowed hard, quelling the memory of the pain that event had caused her, "she lost her abilities. I don't really know why. Maybe it was having the link severed so brutally, but she can't move things or people any more." Her face showed clearly the sorrow she felt at her sister's loss, and he reached up to stroke her face.

"Well then, we'll have to find another reason, but somehow we'll find a way." Gideon kept his face from showing the thought that followed. [And somehow, I'll find the strength not to fight her or fuck her.]

Having showed how much she appreciated Matthew's agreement to take Angel with them, Demon rested her head back on his shoulder. When his breathing had returned to normal, she looked up at him and smiled. "I'm sorry, Matthew, but I'm really going to have to go and feed Marcus."

Gideon looked down at her and frowned. "Can't Lily take care of that?"

Demon smiled. "Of course she can, but she can't take care of my sore tits. They're full to bursting."

Gideon laughed and rolled her onto her back again, moving his mouth down to her nipple, licking it gently, then smiling up at her. "I could try and fix that myself."

She pushed him back gently, laughing. "I thought we'd agreed that you and Marcus would share. Or do I have to get those tattoos?" Demon slid across the bed and walked through to the living room, where she found her dress on the floor and pulled it on over her head. As she smoothed the dress down, Matthew's arms came around her and pulled her back to him as he stood behind her. Her ass fitted neatly into his groin as he nuzzled her neck.

"Are you sure you need to go now?" His voice was wheedling.

"Yes, right now, before you distract me any more. You'd better stay here just in case Magnusson calls." Demon turned in his arms and kissed him, raising her hand to push his hair back from his forehead. "And you still need a haircut." She disentangled herself, kissed Matthew one last time and left the suite.

Gideon sighed as he watched the door close behind her, telling himself that at least this time, he knew that she'd come back. Glancing at the clock on the wall, he was surprised to see that it was only mid-night. Even with the extra forty odd minutes of the Mars day, it felt later than that. So much had happened since he'd left the suite to go to the hearing. But where the hell was Magnusson? It had been over five hours since he and Gideon had parted company at the court. Surely he must have come up with something by now? He knew that Magnusson had intended to go to the Security station to review the witness statements and then planned to use his network of contacts, to check the validity of those statements. Gideon found that his good mood, which his reconciliation with Deborah had promoted, was dissipating as his irritation with Magnusson grew. Why the hell couldn't the lawyer have called and let him know what was happening?

Gideon marched back into the bedroom and grabbed his robe, then returned to the comm. unit in the living room and started making calls, trying to track Magnusson down. After an increasingly frustrating thirty minutes, he sat back in his chair and gave up. He'd just decided that he'd try again in the morning when the door buzzer sounded. Yelling, "Open," he shut down the comm. unit then turned, saying, "Did you forget..." to find that it wasn't Deborah standing in the doorway as he'd expected, but Magnusson.

"About time." Gideon stood and gestured for the lawyer to enter. "Where the hell have you been? Have you found anything useful?"

Magnusson's nostrils flared as he entered the room. There was an elusive smell in the air, just hovering out of range of his ability to identify, but whatever it was made him restless.

He looked at Gideon, taking in the black robe and the bare feet. "Had you gone to bed? Perhaps I should have waited until morning rather than wake you."

Gideon shook his head. "I wasn't asleep. Tell me, what have you found out?"

Magnusson took a deep breath and walked across the room to sit on the sofa. He sniffed again. The scent was slightly stronger here, but he still couldn't identify it. Gideon leaned back against the window opposite, waiting for him to speak.

"I've been tracking down contacts, using them to find witnesses, then listening to their versions of what happened when the Brakiri was killed. It's a long story Captain, are you sure that you wouldn't prefer to wait until morning?" The only reason Magnusson had bothered to come to the suite that night, was to ensure that Gideon had followed his instructions and stayed put. Having reassured himself, he wanted to go and find Demon, to tell her what he'd done and what he planned to do to help her sister. If he were lucky, she might be grateful and who knows where that could lead? Even if she still resisted him, it would be an opportunity to stress how much damage Gideon had done by having Angel arrested.

"No, tell me now, I want to..." Before Gideon could finish his sentence, the door to the suite slid open, and Magnusson looked up to see Demon standing there. His groin pulsed as he looked at her. Her hair was still braided, but she was now wearing a dress that left her shoulders bare, while clinging to her breasts, waist and hips. The full skirt swirled around her calves, almost demanding to be flipped up, to give access to the parts of her that Magnusson wanted most. Demon's eyes widened as she saw him, and she almost ran to Gideon's side, where he reached an arm around her, pulling her to him and kissing her cheek.

Magnusson controlled his fury. [How the hell did this happen? I should never have gone off...] He pushed those thoughts away, realizing that Demon was reading his emotions and watching his every move. [Shit! She knows!] He suddenly realized that Demon had probably known how he felt from the moment he met her, and she was bright enough to have figured out his motivations for his actions. But for the moment at least, it didn't seem that she'd told Gideon. [Maybe I can keep pissing in safety for a while longer.]

Finally, Magnusson identified the elusive smell that had been unsettling him since he arrived. It was the smell of sex. Not strong, but there. The air conditioning in the suite had almost removed it, but they must have been fucking like wild things not long before to still leave traces in the air.

Another surge of anger hit him. Demon may be Gideon's wife, but the idea of him fucking her nearly drove Magnusson mad. The lawyer pushed down his anger and jealousy again, knowing that it would only damage his cause at this stage. Although looking at the two people standing by the window, he wondered if there was any chance at all of winning Demon over. She stood next to Gideon as if welded to his side, Gideon's arm reached around her waist and hers around his. Magnusson watched as Demon turned to Gideon and smiled at him, returning his kiss. The look of love and passion in her eyes made Magnusson want to scream.

He cleared his throat and got their attention. "I'm afraid I don't have much good news for you."

He went on to explain that having reviewed the witness statements, he'd instructed his agents to track down the two key eyewitnesses. "They're a couple of low lives called Les and Mike Loomwet. They run a protection racket in the sleazier parts of town and Les is a leader in the local Humanity First organization." Magnusson described how this group believed humans to be better than all other lifeforms, and looked for every opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of the Ultimate Race, as they called themselves. "These cretins are barely sentient, but they're vicious and dangerous. It seems that your friend Karlven, or Nikarran, or whatever his name was, walked into the bar looking for work

just at the time this group was meeting. I spoke to the bar owner, and he told me what happened."

Apparently Nikarran had made a polite request for work, which the owner had nervously declined. Nikarran had bowed and gone to leave, only to find his way blocked by the Humanity First group. "They pushed him around for a while, trying to provoke him, but he stayed calm, not letting them bait him, probably hoping that if he didn't react they'd get bored and let him go. He was wrong. His lack of response enraged them until Les, always the ringleader, pulled a knife and stabbed him. The Brakiri managed to stagger into the street outside before he collapsed and died."

Magnusson watched as Demon turned her head into Gideon's shoulder and wept quietly. He gritted his teeth as he watched Gideon stroke her hair and kiss her forehead, trying to comfort her. If his plan had worked it would have been him comforting her, stroking her hair, kissing her... He pulled his attention back from fantasy to reality. Gideon had started talking.

"So this is good news! You've found a witness who can testify that Angel didn't kill Nikarran."

Magnusson shook his head. "The bar owner won't testify. He's too scared of what Loomwet and his gang would do in retaliation. And none of the other people in the bar will give evidence against Les because they're all his cronies. They'll perjure themselves and say that Angel came into the bar, fought with the Brakiri, stabbed him and ran out. They'd seen Angel around with Nikarran, assumed that their relationship was sexual, and decided that she'd make a good scapegoat. A lesson to any other humans who dared to fraternize with aliens. And Nikarran's last word being her name, just played into their hands. "

Magnusson stood and looked across at the couple, standing close together, arms entwined, the picture of marital happiness. It made him want to vomit. "I'll keep looking, and my agents are still hunting down leads, particularly anyone who could testify to Angel being elsewhere at the time of the murder. But I'll be honest with you, it doesn't look good. On what I've seen so far, the chances of us getting her acquitted of this murder charge are close to nil. Unless we get some sort of miracle in the next forty-eight hours, Angel is going to be mind-wiped."

Gideon stood holding Deborah in his arms long after Magnusson had left. She hadn't reacted to Magnusson's statement about Angel's prospects, or to his parting shot. "Of course, if she hadn't been arrested on such a stupid charge in the first place, she wouldn't be in this mess now."

Gideon was all too aware of his own contribution to that mess. He'd waited for Deborah to react, not knowing if she would scream, cry, throw things or whatever. She'd done none of those things, just leaned her head on his shoulder as they stood by the window in the living room, not speaking or moving. He'd put his arms around her and been relieved when she moved hers around his waist, holding onto him for support.

He kissed the top of her head where it rested on his shoulder and spoke quietly. "It's late. Let's go to bed, and we can think about what we do next."

Deborah lifted her head and smiled sadly at him. "When we go to bed, we don't tend to do a lot of thinking, we're too busy doing other things." She kissed him gently on the lips, the full weight of sadness and defeat showing in her eyes.

Gideon pulled her back into a tight hug. "I'm sorry. I know that this is my fault, but we will figure a

way out of it. We're not going to let anything bad happen to Angel. I just don't know quite how to prevent it at the moment." Gideon took a deep breath and straightened, kissing her forehead, then pushing her gently away from him. "But tomorrow, we'll get together with the others, and we'll work something out. I can't think of a single thing that could get in the way of Galen and Dureena when they have their minds set on achieving something, and Max is always telling us that he's a genius, maybe he can think of something."

He watched as Deborah frowned before asking, "Do you think that Max and Dureena will help? Have they really forgiven Angel for what she did?"

Gideon reached out and stroked her face, running his thumb gently along her cheekbone. "Dureena has a fierce sense of justice. She won't allow Angel to be punished for something that she didn't do." He smiled. "And I suspect that Ilas can get Max to do more or less anything she wants. Galen will do everything he can to help Angel, and you know that John, Luke and Lily will do whatever it takes. With a team like that behind us, we can do anything."

He started to pull her gently towards the bedroom. "Now let's get some sleep, so that we can think straight in the morning."

Deborah followed him to the side of the bed, then moved back into his arms. "Do we have to sleep? Or think?"

Gideon smiled and kissed her again. "After last night I need as much sleep as I can get, but I guess with the right incentive, I might be able to keep my eyes open for a while."

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