

The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 5: New Horizons

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Even with a new life before her, the past is never far from Angel.

Chapter 1

Demon held her sisters tightly, having no idea when they would be together again. She had fought her sadness on her way to the landing bay, drawing strength from the constant pressure of Matthew's arm around her waist, and the happiness and contentment he felt at having her at his side. They had followed Max, as he carried Ilas, cradled against his chest, with Dureena walking alongside them, one hand resting on Ilas' arm. Trace, Lily, Luke and John had followed them onto the bullet car, where they had all sat in silence on their way to the landing bay.

Demon had sent a quiet call to her sister. *[[Angel? Are you here with us?]]* It had been strange to feel her sister's answer coming from so close by, when she couldn't see her.

[[Yes, Demon, we're right here. This is rather good fun you know. I like being invisible.]] Angel's amusement at her situation had come through in her mental voice.

Demon had smiled quietly to herself and sent back, *[[Just don't drop any more things on Matthew's*

head, please. I like his head just the way it is and don't want any dents. I assume that you have your powers back?]]

Angel's happy laugh had sounded around the bullet car, causing the others to all turn in the direction of the noise. Demon had felt Matthew's arm tighten around her waist, and his lips had touched her ear softly as he whispered, "That's the best sound I've heard in a long time. Let's hope we hear more of it."

Demon had lost control of herself momentarily and a wave of her love for Matthew had escaped her, washing over the others in the bullet car, causing everyone to smile.

Max had looked up from where he still held Ilas cradled in his lap. "Captain, if your wife keeps doing that, you're going to have the happiest crew in the whole of the ISA, but you'd better make damned sure that everyone keeps their contraceptive shots up to date, or you'll be up to your ears in babies."

Gideon had laughed and hugged Demon as she'd turned her head into his shoulder and blushed. "I'll get the doctor to dose the food." They had arrived at the landing bay at that moment and left the bullet car, to find the nurse waiting with Vya in her arms. Dureena had taken the baby, and they had all proceeded through the landing bay doors to stand by the shuttle.

When the nurse had left and the doors had closed, Galen and Angel had reappeared and after a few brief words, Max, Dureena, Gideon, Galen, Matheson and Raven had moved to the foot of the shuttle ramp, leaving the sisters alone, while Trace had gone up the ramp to prepare the shuttle for launch.

The witches had moved into a close circle and put their arms around each other, holding each other tightly, linking together one last time before their youngest sister left them. Demon couldn't hold back any longer and sent to Ilas, *[[Are you sure? Are you really sure you want to do this? We love you Ilas, and we'll miss you so much.]]*

Tears streamed down Ilas' face as she looked back at her sisters, but her mental voice was firm. *[[I have to do this, Demon. I have to know who I am, who my people were, who my son is. I have to know whether, like Dureena, I'm truly the last of my race.]]* She stretched her arms to encircle all three of her sisters before she went on, *[[But we'll see each other often, I promise. We'll visit you, and we'll send messages telling you where we are and what we're doing. Please don't worry about me or be sad, I'll be with people I love, and who love me as much as my sisters always have. It hurts to leave you all, but it would hurt more to stay. Can you understand that?]]*

Demon felt Lily and Angel's minds joining hers in sending their understanding and love to Ilas. They merged into a single entity, to send their sister a message from the three who were now one. *[[We love you Ilas, and we always will. You will always have a home with us, wherever we are. We wish you success in your quest and happiness in your life. Go with our blessings and our love.]]* The merge broke apart, and the sisters stepped back from each other, breaking their link at last.

Ilas smiled sadly at her sisters, then turned to the others who stood watching. She called across to Max, "Did you bring my bag?" Max stepped forward and held out a carryall, which Ilas took from him, then turned back to her sisters. "I have presents for you. Some things for you to remember me by." Reaching into the deep bag, she first pulled out a data crystal, which she held out to Demon. "This is for you."

Demon took it gently and looked at her youngest sister quizzically. "What is it?"

Ilas smiled and nodded at the crystal. "It's pictures of your wedding. Max took along a holocamera and took pictures of you when you arrived, then of you and Matthew as you exchanged vows. There are some beautiful pictures on there, Demon, I know that you'll enjoy them." Ilas' smile turned impish as she continued, "The Captain looks very handsome in his dress uniform, but he may not be very happy with a couple of the shots Max took before you arrived. His uniform must have been itching in some interesting places, from the way he's scratching in those pictures."

Demon was torn between laughter and tears, clutching the data crystal tightly in her hand. Her voice wobbled as she spoke, "Oh thank you, Ilas! I was so unhappy that we hadn't any pictures of the wedding, and now you've given me the best gift..." she ran out of words and flung her arms around her youngest sister, hugging her fiercely.

Lily was fighting back tears as Demon finally let go of their baby sister, and Ilas turned towards her, removing something from the bag that was wrapped in an intricately embroidered cloth, and holding it out to her.

"Dureena and I made it for you," Ilas said, her voice betraying her emotions.

Lily took the gift and unwrapped the cloth carefully, layer after layer, gasping as it finally revealed an incredibly beautiful dagger. The handle of dark hardwood was intricately carved with the symbols of the elements air and earth on one side, fire and water on the other, representing the four sisters. Brass inlays enhanced its beauty further, as well as the emeralds crowning the pommel and the ends of the guard, also made of brass. The tan leather sheath was painted with the same symbols covering the handle, and was capped off with a brass throat and tip. Speechless, Lily drew the dagger and looked at it, immediately seeing that, like the other parts, it was a work of art and high craftsmanship. [Or craftswomanship in this case.] But it also showed how much love had flowed into its creation. Lily pushed the blade back into its sheath, still searching for words, as she looked up at Ilas.

"Thank you," she finally whispered, as she pulled her sister into a tight hug. Lily could feel tears threatening to rise in her eyes and let go of her sister abruptly, seeing her shaky smile mirrored on the shape-shifter's face as she stood back, then looked over to where Dureena stood smiling softly. "Thank you," Lily mouthed, and the tiny Zanderi nodded.

Angel watched as Ilas gave her sisters each a special gift, and her heart jumped into her throat as Ilas finally turned to her, smiling at her softly. Wordlessly at first, she reached into the carryall and brought something out. Angel's eyes moved away from Ilas' face to look down at what she was being handed.

She was robbed momentarily of the ability to breathe, as her hand made contact with the old, battered, one-eyed, stuffed unicorn, that for as far back as she could remember had been her companion. It had been a gift, a lifetime ago, from her mother, and it had represented more than just a mere toy. Despite the fact that he now looked even more worn than the last time Angel had seen him, his once white coat now even more discolored, and his golden horn and hooves not so shiny, he was still the noblest looking unicorn she had ever seen.

Angel gasped, taking in some much needed air, and looked at Ilas with tear filled eyes, trying to find her voice, which seemed to have deserted her, as a rush of overwhelming joy filled her. "How?"

whispered Angel, wondering how it could be possible that she had her childhood toy back. The last time she had seen him had been the day when the Vorlon abducted her and Demon. Since then, she had believed he was gone forever.

Ilas broke into a broad smile and glanced back at Demon and Lily, who were watching with teary smiles, "Lily found him," said Ilas, as an even bigger smile stretched her face.

Angel's throat burned with her emotions as she frowned, saying softly, "I don't understand."

Ilas smiled at her gently and quickly explained how Lily had found the toy, along with other items belonging to her sisters, hidden in a room, obviously stored away by the Vorlon.

"We kept him with us all this time, knowing how much he means to you, and that you would want him back," said Ilas, as she placed her hands over Angel's and held the stuffed toy as if it were the most precious thing in existence.

Angel let out a small cry and threw her arms around her little sister, tears streaming down her face as she whispered hoarsely into Ilas' ear. "Thank you, you'll never know just what you have given me."

Ilas pulled back so she could look into Angel's eyes. "I think I do, Angel." Angel looked down at her sister for a moment, then hugged her hard. They remained holding each other for a long moment.

Finally, Ilas pulled herself away from Angel, and they both sniffed loudly and wiped their tears away, trying to put on a brave face. Angel noticed a movement to her left and turned her head to see Max approaching. The expression on his face was clear, it was time to go. Angel's heart skipped several beats, and once again, she found it hard to breathe as the time to bid her baby sister a final goodbye had arrived.

The four sisters took each other's hands and held them tightly, as they moved to form a closed circle. With Ilas in physical contact with Lily and Demon, who held her hands, she was once again brought into the link with her sisters and it allowed them to communicate telepathically with her.

[[We're going to miss you so much, Ilas,]] Demon, Lily and Angel spoke together, their voices thick with emotion. None of them was aware that Max had stopped a few feet away from them, while the others joined him to watch as the sisters said their final goodbye.

[[I may be going to find my past, but I will never be away from you. We'll always be sisters,]] Ilas replied softly, her own voice betraying the tears that threatened to fall. Her words caused her three sisters to start crying, the tears falling down their faces.

Together the sisters spoke out loud, raising their voices in unison, echoing through the landing bay. "We are four but we are one, as time will always echo through eternity."

Gideon stood beside Max, his eyes riveted on the four sisters as they stood in a tight circle, holding hands, their heads bowed and their eyes closed, clearly once again talking through the link. He tore his eyes away from them for a moment, to look at the others standing beside him and saw that they, too, were all transfixed by the sight before them. Their faces were masks of sorrow, that the four women who had been together for so long, were now parting. His eyes fell on Max and what he saw shocked him. There were tears in the Xenoarchiologist's eyes. Something about seeing the always arrogant and

self-assured Max Eilerson in tears, brought a lump to Gideon's own throat. He swallowed hard and turned his attention back to the sisters.

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the landing bay began to change, as Angel started to chant something, softly, in an ancient language he couldn't understand. Beside him, he heard Galen whispering the same words under his breath, a small smile on his lips, the only other person there to immediately understand what Angel was saying and what it meant. Gideon glanced over at Max, and could see the linguist frowning in concentration, obviously trying to decipher what was being said. The only thing clear to Gideon at that point was that the sisters were about to perform some kind of spell or ritual.

Angel's voice filled the landing bay, seeming to infuse the place with warmth that filled them all with a sense of peace and love. It became more than just a sense, as he felt it with every fiber of his being and realized that Deborah was sending out those emotions. Then a soft, almost inaudible, humming began.

Angel's voice began to fade, and Gideon watched in awe as a light began to form around each sister. A bright, almost blue-white, light surrounded Deborah. A soft, green light enveloped Lily and a warm, red glow surrounded Angel. Ilas was the only one free of any aura, and Gideon wondered if that was because of her separation from the link, but as he continued watching, he realized that wasn't the reason.

Lily's voice spoke out, sounding like her, yet as if there were other voices speaking beneath hers. "By the Earth that is her body, by the air that is her breath."

Gideon listened transfixed as her voice faded away to be replaced by Angel's husky tones, also sounding as if combined with other voices, as she continued where Lily had left off. "By the fire of her bright spirit, and by the waters of her living womb, the circle is open, but unbroken."

Gideon's eyes widened as the auras around Angel, Demon and Lily began to pulse, the humming sound growing slightly louder as they began to change color, all the auras blending into a bright, shimmering, yellow-white light that, strangely, didn't hurt his eyes as he looked at it.

As Angel's voice faded, Deborah's deep voice replaced it, at the same time as the light began to change color yet again, becoming infused with an incredible gold that shimmered as if it were alive. The effect reminded Gideon of a snow globe his grandmother once had. When shaken, the glitter inside shimmered and moved like magical dust.

Deborah's voice filled the landing bay, it too sounding uniquely like her, yet as if other voices were whispering beneath it. "May the peace of the Goddess go in our hearts, merry meet and merry part and merry meet again." As she became silent, Ilas' voice answered, not filled with the whispering undertones of her sisters' voices, but sounding strong and filled with love.

"Blessed be."

Then the light seemed to move through Deborah, Lily and Angel, where their hands met. It seemed to glow even brighter, especially where Lily and Deborah held Ilas' hands. He listened as Deborah, Lily and Angel spoke in unison, sounding distinctly individual again, yet their voices merging as they now repeated the words, "Blessed be."

As they spoke, the light passed from them to Ilas, surrounding her, glowing even brighter in a golden, shimmering blanket around her, so bright that, for a moment, Gideon could no longer see Ilas. Then, slowly, the light began to fade from the three sisters, as if it were draining from them and pouring

itself into the little shape-shifter. Gradually, it began to fade, yet fade didn't seem to be the right word for it. The light seemed to disappear inside Ilas as if she were absorbing it, then it was gone, and the sisters once again stood free of any aura. Gideon noticed that the humming and warmth faded, and the landing bay returned to silence.

The sisters let go of each other's hands and moved to hold each other tightly, in silence. Gideon gave them a few more minutes to be with each other, but then he saw Trace at the shuttle door, obviously having watched the sisters, and it reminded him that it was time for Max, Ilas and Dureena to depart.

He walked over to where the sisters were still huddled together, and gently cleared his throat. Deborah's head came up and she looked at him with red, swollen eyes, a trail of tears fresh on her cheeks and he gave her a sad, gentle smile. "It's time."

Demon almost threw herself into Matthew's arms as the time finally arrived for her sister to leave. She felt his arms go around her and hug her, then the gentle touch of his lips on her forehead, all the while accompanied by his strong feelings of love for her. She lifted her head to look into his eyes, seeing the sympathetic and loving smile on his face, and wanted to weep again, but she knew that, at this moment, she had to be strong. Pulling herself sternly under control, Demon turned to look at the others. Trace was now holding Vya in his arms, standing at the top of the shuttle ramp, watching everything going on below. Max and Dureena held Ilas between them, stroking her gently, touching her, kissing her, and Demon knew that they would take care of her baby sister. Only that knowledge made this parting bearable.

Lily stood between John and Luke, wrapped in their arms, enveloped in their love, crying gently on John's shoulder.

Angel stood alone, her hands over her face, weeping. Demon couldn't feel her sister's pain, but she knew how hard this was for Angel. She had only just found her family again, and now, it was being torn apart. Demon started to move to free herself from Matthew's embrace, to go to her sister, when she saw Luke kiss the top of Lily's head gently, then move to where Angel stood.

Luke took Angel gently into his arms and held her as she cried on his shoulder. Relieved that someone was caring for her sister, Demon glanced over at where Galen stood, alone. He still leaned on his staff heavily, his face drawn and pale. Demon realized that the Technomage had exhausted himself in helping them bring Angel back into their link and freeing Ilas. Creating the shield of invisibility to allow Angel to join them in the landing bay had drained him even further, and he was now struggling to stand. Demon watched as Galen straightened and looked over at where Luke held Angel while she wept, and saw the expression of wistful sorrow that passed over the Technomage's face. Demon could feel Galen's tiredness, and his regret that his weakness had caused him to miss an opportunity to comfort Angel. The tall blonde's attitude towards the Technomage softened a little further, as she sensed those feelings.

Then Demon felt Matthew gently pushing her towards the shuttle and knew that the time had come. Max, Ilas and Dureena were really leaving.

Gideon gently nudged Deborah towards the shuttle ramp where Max, Ilas and Dureena stood. He, John and Luke had quietly said their good-byes to Max and Dureena, while Ilas was giving her sisters their

presents. Galen had stood back, not wanting to intrude, aware that Max and Dureena needed time to forgive him for his part in helping the murderer of their child.

Now Gideon turned to Max and Dureena for the last time, holding out his left hand towards them, his right, encased in the black glove Luke had forced on him, still wrapped around Deborah's waist.

Max reached out and awkwardly grasped Gideon's hand. His smile was quirked to one side, as he said, "I'll say 'au revoir', Captain, not goodbye. Something tells me that our paths will cross again."

Gideon grinned back, squeezing the linguist's hand firmly, "I hope so, Max. Without you around, I'm going to have to tell someone else to shut up. The trouble is, if I try that on Deborah, she'll probably hit me."

Max laughed, and Gideon turned his attention to Dureena, again holding out his left hand. Dureena took it in both of hers and grasped it tightly. Gideon spoke softly, "I haven't forgotten my promise. I won't stop looking and one day I'll find him and bring him to justice. I won't give up, Dureena."

Dureena nodded and whispered, "I know. Thank you."

Gideon pulled the Zanderi close and gently kissed her forehead, before saying, "Take care of yourself, Dureena, and take care of Max." He started to smile as he went on, "I'm trusting you to keep him out of trouble. Don't let him get too rich on bonuses from IPX, or you'll have nothing left to steal, and that would be no fun at all."

Dureena laughed and moved back to join Ilas and Max at the foot of the shuttle ramp. They started to ascend, when Max suddenly stopped and turned. "Oh, Captain, I nearly forgot. I have something of yours."

Gideon watched as Eilerson walked back down the ramp, digging into his jacket pocket as he moved. When he reached Gideon, he held out a data crystal, saying, "I believe this is yours. I don't think that Magnusson can win the bet now, so you'd better take it back."

Gideon took the crystal, hoping that Deborah wouldn't ask what it was. Attempting to distract her, he spoke quickly, "Thanks. I wish I could collect all my gambling debts so easily."

Max grinned back, obviously aware of what Gideon was trying to do. "Just remind me not to bet against you. You obviously have a knack of picking winners." He nodded at Deborah, making her blush.

Gideon laughed again. "That I do, Max, and I'm betting that the three of you, and young Vya, will have a long and happy future together. Keep in touch, and come visit when you can."

Eilerson nodded and turned to the ramp, heading back up to rejoin Dureena and Ilas at the top. As he reached them, Deborah looked up and called out, "You take care of our baby sister, now. If you don't, you'll have the Witches of Eriadne after you." She smiled bravely, trying to make a joke as her tears flowed freely.

Gideon started to lead her and the others back to the door of the landing bay. They were halfway there, when Angel suddenly broke away and turned back towards the shuttle, where Max, Ilas and Dureena still stood watching.

"Wait." Angel sounded nervous as she took a step back towards the shuttle. "I can't leave it like this. Dureena, can we talk?"

Gideon took a deep breath and held Deborah tightly against his side. He had no idea what was going to happen next, but whatever it was would be between Angel and Dureena. He didn't want his wife getting involved.

Angel walked slowly towards the shuttle, watching as Dureena looked at Max and Ilas. They both hugged the little thief and said something to her. Angel couldn't hear what they were saying, but they were obviously words of encouragement, because Dureena turned to look at Angel for a moment, before walking slowly back down the ramp towards her.

They met halfway between the shuttle and the spot where the others were standing, watching intently. As Dureena stopped in front of her, Angel found her courage and determination to do this failing under Dureena's intense golden gaze. The thief stood silently, waiting for Angel to speak.

Angel took in a deep steadying breath. [You can do this, Angel. You have to do this,] she told herself. Letting out the breath slowly, Angel began, nervously. "Dureena, I'm..." Angel found her voice faltering, as she wondered if anything she could say would ever be enough to make up for what she had done. She felt her throat contract tightly as a wave of guilt, anger and sadness washed over her, but instead of letting it cripple her, she cleared her throat, her voice gruff and unsteady with emotion, and forced herself to go on.

"I'm so sorry, Dureena. More than you could ever know. I'm sorry with all my heart and soul for the loss of your baby." Angel stopped, as she saw pain flicker across Dureena's face and tears glisten in her golden eyes, then taking in a shaky breath, she continued, well aware of everyone watching, but not letting it distract her. "If I had known, Dureena. If I had known what would happen when I brought Lucas back, please believe me, I would never, NEVER have performed the rebirth spell." Angel stopped for a moment to get her runaway emotions back under control. This was one of the hardest things she had ever had to do, but also the most important and most necessary.

Angel pushed on, even though she could see the anger and hatred that appeared on Dureena's face, mixing with the pain and sadness, at the mention of Lucas' name. "If I could, I would go back and change what I did, Dureena. I would give my life to be able to do that." Angel's voice cracked, and she found it hard to continue, as her throat tightened with the strength of her emotions, then swallowing hard, she managed to go on. "But I can't change the past. All I can do is say 'I'm sorry' and hope that somehow you can find it in your heart to forgive me."

Dureena was silent for a long time, and Angel felt her heart tearing as she began to think the little alien woman wasn't going to respond. In uncertainty, Angel looked across at Max and Ilas who were waiting on the shuttle ramp, watching with concern and love.

"Angel?"

Angel's attention came back to Dureena as she heard her name being called, surprised at what she saw in Dureena's eyes. She had begun to think that Dureena was going to tell her to go to hell, to tell Angel that she hated her and would never forgive her for what she had done. What she saw in Dureena's eyes was understanding and even a trace of kindness.

When Dureena spoke again, her voice wasn't filled with anger or hatred, only sadness. "I forgive you, Angel." At those first words, Angel's heart began to beat rapidly with a sense of bittersweet relief. Angel continued to listen as Dureena went on softly, "I don't blame you for what happened. I know that Lucas manipulated you and misled you. He never warned you of the consequences of bringing him back. Ilas has often told me how much you respect life, and that you would never knowingly or willingly risk another's life, but although I forgive you, I won't lie. I can't forget what you did, and it's easier for me to not be around you for now, as you're a reminder of Lucas and of the loss of my baby. Maybe in time, I can be around you without it hurting. I think that in some ways, you feel the same. I'm a reminder of what you feel responsible for, but please know that I don't hold you responsible, I have forgiven you for your part. In time, I hope you can forgive yourself."

Dureena hesitated. Angel watched, stunned by what Dureena had said, feeling a mixture of things. Hurt at Dureena's admission of being unable to be around her, understanding, as she couldn't blame Dureena for needing to be away from her, and hope that one-day, maybe they could be around each other without causing pain. But mostly she felt overwhelming relief that Dureena had forgiven her.

Angel stood staring in awe at the little Zanderi, watching as she turned to look at Max and Ilas on the shuttle ramp, then turning back to look over at the people standing behind Angel, smiling at them softly before looking back at Angel.

"I have to go now." To Angel's surprise, Dureena reached out and took hold of Angel's hand, squeezing it gently. "May the Gods keep you safe, Angelique Denier."

Letting go of Angel's hand, Dureena turned and began to walk away. Finally, Angel managed to find the voice that had deserted her and called out to Dureena, bringing her to a halt. Dureena turned and Angel gave her a bittersweet smile and put all her feelings of relief and gratitude into her words. "Thank you, and may the Gods keep you safe too, Dureena Nafeel."

Dureena gave her smile that actually reached her eyes, nodded one last time, then walked away to join Max and Ilas at the top of the ramp. Angel watched as Ilas looked at all her sisters one last time, then waved to them, bravely, before letting Max and Dureena guide her into the shuttle.

Angel stood alone in the middle of the landing bay, unmoving as she watched the shuttle's ramp lift up, and the shuttle door close behind them. She jumped as Demon startled her by putting her arm around her shoulders. Angel looked up at her sister, who looked down at her with love and concern. "Are you OK, Angel?"

Angel nodded, then whispered, "She forgave me, Demon. Dureena forgave me." With that, the tears she had controlled until now began to flow freely, and Demon took her sister in her arms, holding her tightly against her, whispering soothing words into her ear.

After a few moments, Angel pulled herself together and shooed Demon away, telling her to go back to her husband. She watched as her sisters joined their men, feeling once again the odd one out as they filed out of the landing bay, to where they could watch the shuttle leaving, from an observation window. She soon realized she wasn't alone, as Galen came and walked alongside her, the two of them taking up the rear. She looked at him and smiled, then frowned as she noticed his pallor. Angel suddenly realized that the ritual to bring her back into the link, and then to shield her from sight, had exhausted him.

"Are you all right, Galen?"

Galen looked at her, his blue eyes reflecting warmth despite the exhaustion that showed in them, and he smiled. "I will be, once I can recharge."

Angel smiled back at him. "I'm glad to hear that, Galen." It took Angel a little by surprise that she really meant that, and realized that what had happened between them in the past was truly forgiven. They could now be friends. She knew that Galen still had romantic feelings towards her, but she knew he would never act on them. For a brief moment, Angel wondered what would have happened if she had fallen in love with Galen, but she stopped herself, quickly. Wondering about 'what ifs' was pointless.

She was roused from her inner thoughts by a question from Galen, as they joined the others by the observation window. "And you, Angelique Denier, are you going to be all right?" She knew that there was more to that question than what had happened that day, or Ilas leaving.

Angel let out a soft sigh, before she answered truthfully. "Yes, Galen. I believe I will."

Galen looked down at the little raven-haired witch and silently prayed that she was right. Then he, too, turned to join everyone as they looked out the observation window.

Everyone went silent as they watched the shuttle slowly make its way out of the landing bay, finally disappearing from view, as the landing bay doors closed behind it. Leaving behind three sisters, who were already missing their beloved little shape-shifter, but wishing her well as she began the journey to discover more about herself. All knowing that one day, somehow, they would all be together again.

Lying on his back in the early morning, looking up at Deborah as she straddled him, Gideon wondered if there was any sight in the galaxy that he found more beautiful. Her head was thrown back, her eyes closed, her hair cascading down her back, and she bit her lip as she slowly thrust up and down onto his stiff cock, taking it as deep inside her as she could, rotating her hips with each thrust. Gideon was controlling himself, letting her lead, just gently meeting her downward push with a lift of his hips to bury himself deep inside her. Her hands held his wrists by his sides, a gentle grip that he was content to leave for the moment. Much as he loved to touch and fondle his wife's breasts, Gideon was enjoying the sight of them gently bouncing in time with her movements and didn't want to impede the view.

Deborah was lifting him to a level of pleasure that no other woman ever had, ever would or ever could take him. [Unless I can find some other stunningly beautiful, projecting empath to fall in love with,] Gideon thought, as he felt her vagina tightening, getting closer to climax with every thrust. Sensing she was near, he released his left hand from her grip and slid it between their bodies, finding and massaging her clitoris. Deborah exploded into orgasm, sending her waves of pleasure through him, taking him with her, squeezing his ejaculation from him as she rode him to new heights of ecstasy. The pulses of her orgasm continued with each touch of Gideon's hand to her clit, until they were both screaming with bliss.

As the waves of pleasure receded, Deborah fell forward onto Gideon's chest, panting for breath, bringing her hands to his shoulders, holding him tightly. He ran his hands over her back and arms as they both recovered, feeling the silky warmth of her skin, damp with her sweat after her exertions, allowing his hands the gratification of stroking, touching, caressing every part of her he could reach. Then he lay still, quietly basking in the afterglow of their lovemaking, enjoying the sensation of her

breasts pressed against his chest and her vagina still clasping his slowly softening cock. Gideon smiled quietly to himself, as he realized that from now on, every day of the rest of his life could start just like this.

Gideon felt more than heard the deep throaty chuckle that Deborah gave, as she lay quietly on top of him. He turned and kissed her forehead, asking, "What's funny?"

Deborah turned her head towards him and lifted a hand to push back her hair. "You are." She smiled and lifted herself off him to lie at his side, her head propped on her hand and her other hand running over Gideon's chest, playing with the hair surrounding his nipple. Leaning forward to kiss his shoulder, she looked up at him and smiled again. "You're happy. If you were a cat, you'd be purring."

Gideon rolled onto his side to face her, lifting his hand to push Deborah's hair back behind her ear, letting him see the face that he loved more clearly. "If I'm not happy right now, then take me out and shoot me, because there's no hope for me."

Deborah laughed and kissed his shoulder again, before grinning up at him. "I haven't done with you yet, I'll shoot you later." Gideon chuckled and grabbed her, turning her onto her back before kissing her deeply. When he released her, he rolled back, pulling her to his side, his right arm around her shoulders as she snuggled up to him.

"So what's making you so happy, then?" She smiled up at him from where her head rested on his shoulder.

"Well, it could have something to do with being married to the most beautiful, sexiest, smartest, funniest woman in the galaxy, who for some strange reason is passionately in love with me and wants to make passionate love with me at every opportunity. And maybe the fact that she's given me a beautiful son helps too. Oh, and I have a job I love, running the best ship and crew in the fleet, on a mission I totally believe in. Is that enough? No, sorry, I forgot that I have good friends on board with me, and that I happen to worship and adore my beautiful wife. Will that do?" Gideon lifted Deborah's chin to kiss her gently.

She smiled up at him again, her golden-brown eyes filled with warmth and love. "It's a start."

Gideon laughed again and squeezed her shoulders. "And what about you? Are you happy?"

Deborah smiled, and a wave of pure joy swept through him. Just for a moment, she had relaxed her control over her emotions and allowed him to feel what she felt. Gideon laughed aloud at the strength of her happiness and love, then spoke softly, "I'll take that as a yes, but I know that Ilas leaving was difficult. Can you still be happy without all your sisters around you?"

Deborah smiled sadly and nodded. "Ilas has grown up and needs to go her own way. She was a child when she came to us, with no memory of who or what she was. I suppose I more or less raised her, and she was the nearest thing I had to a child of my own. But as with all children, as we'll find with Marcus one day, we have to face them growing up and leaving us. I'm happy for her, that she's found people to love her and care for her just as much as her sisters have always done. That makes letting go much easier, but I'll still miss her."

Gideon watched as tears welled up into her eyes, and he kissed her forehead gently as she went on, "But I'm still happy. I have you and Marcus, I have Angel, and I have Lily and her family. I have so much that I never dreamed I could have, how could I possibly be unhappy?"

Wrapping his arms tightly around her, Gideon hugged Deborah closely to him, kissing the top of her head, then held her as he lay silently, enjoying the peace and contentment she brought him. After a short while he sighed. "You know what? I'll miss Max and Dureena. I never thought the day would come when I'd say that, but I will miss Max Eilerson. He and I have been sparring for years now, and I'll miss that. We may never have liked each other that much, but I think we learned to respect each other. And he's been good to us recently. Paying for the hotel on Mars and finding Magnusson for us..."

Gideon paused as he felt Deborah tense within his arms. Lifting her face to where he could look at her more easily he said, "That touched a nerve didn't it? What is it about Magnusson that upsets you so much? That's the second time I've seen you react to his name like that."

Demon looked up into Matthew's puzzled face, wondering just how much to tell him. Since they'd come back to their quarters the previous night, they'd talked very little. They'd both been exhausted, having had little sleep the night before, followed by a long, emotionally harrowing day. They had taken a few moments to remove the black gloves that Raven had put on them both, giggling like naughty children as they did so, then Demon had fed Marcus and put him into his cot. She and Matthew had fallen into bed, making slow, gentle love to each other until they'd fallen asleep in each other's arms.

On waking that morning, Demon had looked at Matthew sleeping beside her for a while, silently taking in his face, relaxed by sleep, washed clean of the tension and responsibility he carried every day. She loved to watch him when he was awake, but loved him even more when he slept, longing to trace her fingers along the line of his jaw, over his lips, pushing back the hair where it had fallen over his forehead. Demon's resistance had eventually broken, and she'd leaned forward to kiss his lips. As Matthew woke, his mouth had opened under hers and his arms came around her, holding her to him, stroking and caressing her until she'd responded as she always did to his touches, with passion and love.

Demon could feel the joy and love Matthew felt as they lay quietly together, luxuriating in the time that they had together. She'd teased him about his feelings and when he'd described how happy he was, she didn't think that she'd ever been happier, but when the subject turned to Magnusson, she didn't know what to do or say. She didn't want to spoil the mood of happiness and contentment, but neither would she lie to him.

Taking a deep breath, Demon told Matthew everything that had happened with Magnusson on Mars. How the lawyer had lusted after her, how he had taken every opportunity to drive a wedge between her and Matthew, blaming the Captain for the situation Angel was in, encouraging Demon at every turn to get her marriage annulled. As Demon spoke, she could feel Matthew's anger rising. Although he was nearly as good as she was at preventing his feelings from showing on his face, his emotions were clear. He was furious.

"Matthew, calm down. I took care of it." Demon knelt beside him and leaned down to kiss the lines that had appeared on his forehead as he glowered.

Matthew continued frowning as he looked up at her, his arms behind his head, lying back on the pillows. "What does that mean? Was Magnusson the reason you were wearing that knife?"

Demon nodded. "I doubt if he would ever have tried anything, but I wanted to be ready just in case."

Matthew's smile was vicious. "I almost wish he had. I'm sure he'd be missing certain parts of his anatomy by now. As it is, I'm tempted to go back down there and remove them myself."

Demon leaned forward and kissed him gently. "You don't need to do anything. I told you, I've taken care of it." She went on to explain about her agreement with Galen, how he was going back to Mars to 'encourage' Magnusson to help him find the real culprits in Nikarran's murder and clear Angel's name. "Of course, having heard how Galen 'encouraged' Lieutenant Carr to cooperate, I wondered if he might just bring us back certain bits of Mr. Magnusson as souvenirs." Her grin was pure evil.

Matthew howled with laughter. "So that's what you two were plotting! Hell, I could almost feel sorry for Magnusson." He reached up to run his fingers along her cheekbone, and Demon leaned her face into his caress. Matthew smiled as he went on. "I'm glad you're on my side."

Demon leaned forward and kissed him gently again, whispering, "On your side, and by your side. I'll never leave your side."

As Deborah straightened from her kiss, Gideon looked up into her face, wondering again what made this woman love him so much, but overjoyed that she did. He reached for her and pulled her down into his arms, kissing her deeply, his hands moving over her back, down to her buttocks, stroking and touching her soft skin. Then he rolled her onto her back and released her mouth, looking down at her, letting her see all the love and passion he felt for her. Gideon smiled as he whispered, "You know damn well that you'd much rather be underneath or on top of me, than at my side."

Deborah chuckled and pulled his head down into another long kiss. They slowly explored each other's bodies again, doing the things that each knew the other liked best, until Gideon finally entered her, driving into her from above, thrusting hard as he kissed her passionately, bringing them both to glorious climax.

Afterwards, they lay quietly together again, Gideon on his back with his arm pulling Deborah close, her legs entwined around his. After a few moments she looked up at him, a puzzled expression on her face. "Matthew? Talking of Magnusson, what exactly was the deal you did with him? He never would tell me how you planned to pay him, and I know that you're still waiting for your back pay to come through."

Gideon considered trying to palm her off with a lie or half-truth, but realized that she'd know if he did that. He sighed deeply. "OK, it looks like it's confession time all round." He told Deborah about the arrangement he'd made about his house, and how Magnusson could win it only if Angel were acquitted. "I didn't have to pay up. That was the data crystal that Max gave me, the deeds to my house. Magnusson can't win the bet now as Angel won't be going to court, so can't be acquitted." He smiled in satisfaction at the thought.

Deborah looked up at him, her eyes wide. "Your house? You were willing to give up your house? But that's..."

Gideon put his fingers to her lips and stopped her. "It was a small price to pay if it helped me win you back. I don't care if all I own are the clothes I stand up in, as long as I have you and Marcus, nothing else really matters."

He watched as Deborah's eyes filled with tears and felt a wave of happiness escape her. She whispered, "I do love you so much, Matthew," and kissed him again. She pulled back and smiled sadly at him. "But what about Angel? She's back in our link and here on the ship, but how are you going to explain her?"

Gideon hugged her. "I've got an idea about that and I'd like to discuss it with you, Angel and Lily later. I'll need John and Luke to be there, too, as it involves them, so we should get together in the conference room at..." He glanced at the clock by the side of the bed. "Shit!" He had less than twenty minutes to get showered, shaved, dressed and onto the bridge.

Leaping out of bed, he started to run towards his old quarters, stopped abruptly, turned back and kissed Deborah, saying, "Late for work," then rushed out of the bedroom to the sound of her quiet laughter.

Fifteen minutes later, he walked back in, ready for his shift, to find that Deborah had taken Marcus from his cot into their bed. The baby was lying on his back in the spot Gideon had vacated, gurgling happily at his mother as she leaned over him, tickling him.

Gideon sat on the edge of the bed and gently kissed his son, then looked up at his wife. "Tell you what, let's send him up to the bridge to play Captain, I'll climb back into bed with you and you can tickle my tummy instead."

Deborah smiled as she leaned forward to kiss him. "I'll refrain from the obvious comment about who would make the better Captain. Now, what time do you want Lily, Angel and me to come to the conference room? And shall I bring you something to eat, as you don't have time for breakfast?"

Gideon hugged her then let her go, smiling. "You know, I think I'm going to enjoy this marriage business. Come up at twelve and yes, can you bring me a sandwich? See you later." He headed for the door, but stopped quickly again as Deborah called after him.

"Matthew! The glove!" She was waving the black glove that Raven had given him to wear the previous day.

Gideon turned back quickly and grabbed the glove, slipping it on over his still sore hand. He leaned forward and kissed her one last time, saying, "Thanks. Luke would *not* be amused if he knew that we'd both taken these damn things off." He reactivated the force field holding his hand immobile and left his quarters, whistling quietly to himself, something he only ever did when he was deeply contented. Gideon couldn't remember when he'd last felt so good.

Deborah and Angel were already there when Gideon arrived at the conference room at two minutes before twelve. He did a double take when he saw his wife's sister, who was wearing a blonde wig and brown contact lenses. He couldn't help but stare at her for a moment, noticing how the colors accentuated the similarity in the set of the bones and the shape of Angel's face to Deborah's. Angel looked at him in silent warning as he sat down, so he wisely refrained from commenting on her disguise, not wanting to start another fight with her.

Deborah handed him his sandwich--[Tuna, my favorite. How did she know that?]-just as John and Luke arrived with Lily between them, arms linked through theirs, smiling broadly. Gideon had to grin when the two men held Lily's chair for her and only sat down after she was comfortable. The tiny

redhead apparently lapped up the attention her two men were lavishing on her, but the way she looked at them also made it clear how much she adored John and Luke.

John noticed Matthew watching them, and when he saw his Captain eating his sandwich, a mischievous sparkle entered the XO's eyes. "Why Captain, didn't you have time for breakfast this morning? What could you possibly have been doing instead?"

Gideon grinned. "At least I'm just eating my sandwich, Lieutenant. I don't insist on being the filling *in* the sandwich." He looked pointedly at Matheson, whose eyes widened as the remark sank in.

For some reason, Angel had a sudden coughing fit, while Luke found a spot on the far wall particularly interesting and amusing to look at. Lily had an inexplicable fit of the giggles, that she tried to stifle by clamping her hands over her mouth. A split-second later, Deborah kicked Matthew's shin under the table, making him wince. She was looking at him sternly, but wasn't entirely able to hide the amused look in her eyes, as she remembered the 'incident' to which her husband was referring. [Oh well, the look John's giving me is worth the pain.] Gideon almost expected his XO to exclaim, "Matthew!" in the tone he always used when he let his Captain know he was behaving impossibly, again.

After quickly finishing his sandwich, Gideon got back to business. "Thank you for coming," he said and continued without further preamble, "As you all know, we are not allowed to carry passengers, with few exceptions." Looking around the table and finally resting his eyes on Angel, he leaned forward onto his elbows. "This does pose a certain problem in your case, Angel, since we can't keep your presence on the Excalibur hidden for long. Not only because others would inevitably start noticing something was odd, but we don't want you to have to hide any longer than absolutely necessary." Gideon suppressed another pang of guilt about his responsibility for what had happened to his sister-in-law, as Angel lowered her eyes at the memory of the months she had spent in hiding. He looked briefly at his wife as he continued, "I have an idea how the problem could be solved..." His eyes wandered across the table, from Raven to Lily, and finally came to rest on John Matheson, "But it will have to be Angel and you three who decide."

Matthew could see John's eyes widen, and the younger man clearly didn't like the way his CO looked at him. [I'm not sure I entirely like this idea of mine myself, my friend.] "I'm afraid the only way I can think of to keep Angel on the ship legally is," Gideon paused and took a deep breath, "if she marries John."

For a moment, there was stunned silence, and before any words could escape from the five mouths hanging open, Gideon raised his hand and continued, looking from John to Angel, "Of course, it would be a marriage in name only, but it's the only way to keep you on the ship, Angel. The only alternative is for you to become one of the crew, which isn't possible, unfortunately. I wouldn't suggest this if there were any other solution I could think of, believe me."

Angel looked at Matthew, still trying to digest what he had said, trying to sort through the emotions whirling through her. Shock, insecurity, sadness? And also some annoyance with Gideon. How could he just give her away as if she were a slave? [Calm down, that's not what he's doing. He's trying to help.] Demon squeezed her hand, and when Angel looked, she found her sister smiling encouragingly. Then Angel's eyes were drawn to the threesome on the other side of the table, who seemed to be conferring telepathically, with Lily and Luke holding John's hands. Angel felt a pang of pain as she watched them, so obviously belonging together. [How can I come between them? Even if it's only a

fictitious marriage, this will change too much for the three of them and the twins.]

As if she'd felt Angel's discomfort, Lily turned to face her, smiling softly. "Don't worry, Angel. If this is the only way for you to stay here, then so be it. Whatever you two decide, Luke and I will accept it. Don't worry about us and the babies. We'll find a way to make this work for all of us."

Angel's eyes finally met John's. "I..." Her voice was barely a whisper, and she started again. "I can't ask this of you, not after all..." Her voice sounded raw, but at least it was loud enough to be understood. Angel couldn't believe that John could be so kind to her, after Lucas had nearly killed him.

John shook his head. "The past is the past. This is about the future. Even if you weren't part of the link, I would never accept you having to leave Demon and Lily again so soon." He looked at Lily and Luke, giving them a tiny smile that expressed more than a hundred words. Then his eyes looked firmly into Angel's. "If you're willing to do this, so am I."

Angel blinked. She didn't want John to do this just because she was Lily's and Demon's sister, but she could also tell that his decision was made, and he wouldn't go back on it. [I barely know him but from what Lily told me, I know I can trust him. Still, what will the consequences for their relationship be?] She took a deep breath, resigning herself to the only possibility she had. [We just have to find a way to make this work. We will!]

"Hold on," Luke said, suddenly, "There may be another solution."

All eyes were on Raven, as he leaned forward and looked at Angel. "You were responsible for medical care on Eriadne. From what your sisters, Kirrin and the other villagers told me, you don't have any professional medical training, but an extensive knowledge of naturopathy and herbal medicine."

Angel nodded, frowning slightly, as she wondered what Luke was getting at. "Most of that, I taught myself from books and vids. I'd already started before we were abducted by the Vorlons. Other things, I learned from the Brakiri, especially about the physiological differences between Human and Brakiri bodies, and their specific needs and remedies."

Luke nodded, a tiny smile on his lips, "Perfect," then looked at Gideon. "To reflect the multitude of species and lifestyles represented in this crew, I want to offer as diverse a range of treatments as possible. We don't have a naturopathic physician on the medical staff yet, let alone someone who has knowledge of traditional Brakiri medicine. If Angel agrees," he smiled at her, "I'd like to add her to my team."

Angel blinked, then stared at Luke wide-eyed, her mouth open in amazement, not sure whether she had misheard. [Me? Working in Medbay? As part of a real medical team?]

Gideon shook his head, a tiny lopsided grin on his lips. "Damn it, Doctor, that never even occurred to me!" he said with appreciation in his voice.

"I'm ashamed to admit that I never thought of it either, since Angel doesn't have a formal medical education," Demon added, a sheepish smile on her face. She turned to face her sister. "Would you like to work on the medical team, Angel? It will be different than on Eriadne and you'll have to learn a lot, but I know how much you loved your duties there and how seriously you took them. You always wanted to expand your knowledge."

Angel looked at her older sister, at Gideon, John, Lily, reading agreement in their smiling faces, and

finally at Luke. "I would love to," she said in a hoarse voice, "I'm not sure how much I'll be able to do, but I'm a quick study, and I'd love to learn more."

Luke gave her a beaming smile that warmed her heart and stood, holding out his hand. "Welcome to the Medbay team, Angelique Denier."

Angel rose, trying not to shake too much from excitement as she took his hand and shook it. "Thank you, Dr. Raven. I'll do my very best."

Gideon held his hand up in warning. "Angel can't use that name aboard just yet. Not until she's cleared of the charges brought against her. So we delay registering her as one of the crew, until Galen comes back and tells us that everything is cleared up, then John can do his magic with the records and backdate the registration. Can you live with that, Angel? We'll be jumping into hyperspace this afternoon, after which, you can get rid of the disguise and move into your new quarters. OK?"

Angel nodded and smiled at her family. "I'll be glad to get rid of the wig. I think one blonde is quite enough for this family, don't you?"

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The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

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