

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

by [The Space Witches](#)

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A tentative truce is forged.

Chapter 3

Lily was sitting on the big bed in their bedroom, feeding the twins and looking out of the porthole as the red of hyperspace sped by. Her thoughts went out to her baby sister, who had stayed behind to finally find out who she was. Lily briefly thought about her own fragmented memories of her past--probably part of the reason why she and Ilas had got along so well, but Ilas had always wanted to find out more, while Lily had decided to accept the loss. [Well, at least I remember some things, but Ilas... She doesn't know anything.] Unconsciously, Lily lifted her hand to rub her temple, when the slight headache she'd periodically experienced since the link transferal ritual came back. [And I hope you will find out, Ilas. I just hope that whatever you find out won't be so bad that you'll wish you'd never started searching.]

She heard someone enter the living room. and a few seconds later John stepped into the bedroom, smiling. He crossed to the bed and sat down, leaning forward to kiss her and stroke Faylinn and Dasha's heads.

"How are you?" he asked, caressing Lily's cheek with his fingers and eyeing her closely. "Head aching again?"

Lily nodded. "I can't really call it an ache. Just a nuisance." She smiled to show him that she was all right.

For a while, they just looked at each other, and Lily thought she could happily spend her life looking into those dark, expressive eyes that were showing so much love and amazement right now.

[[I still can't believe that we're finally together,]] John's familiar mental voice said in her head, the accompanying emotions almost making her cry with joy.

[[You better believe it, because now, you'll have to learn how to change diapers, get up in the middle of the night when they're crying, and all the other joys of fatherhood.]] Lily grinned mischievously, and John groaned and rolled his eyes theatrically.

[[I'll have to see if I can find a rule forbidding XO's from changing diapers, but I guess if I did, that would forbid Captains too, and Demon would kill me. Perhaps I'd better stick to the diapers.]] He gave Lily a teasing smile, then leaned forward to kiss her again. It was a slow, languid kiss, and when they finally broke, John sighed contentedly. *[[I don't think my life could be more perfect than it is right now.]]*

[[Same here,]] Lily answered, letting him feel how happy she was.

John looked down at the twins, who had both fallen asleep, but Faylinn was still softly suckling on Lily's nipple. *[[Should I help you put them in their cots?]]*

Lily thanked him wordlessly and gently released their daughter from her nipple, then held her out for John to take.

He carefully cradled her in his arm, looking at her sleeping form, while Lily adjusted the top of her dress, then he and Lily carried the twins to their room, which had connecting doors to the main bedroom, as well as to the living room. He put Faylinn into her cot, covering her with the now complete coverlet, and Lily did the same with Dasha, whose cot stood next to his sister's. Lily leaned into John's embrace, and for a long while, they just stood there, marveling at their children, sending them love and happiness.

Angel pressed her naked body against Lucas' bare chest as he deepened their kiss, his tongue probing her mouth, her hardened nipples brushed against the soft hairs on his chest, the sensation causing her body to tremble. A soft, muffled moan escaped her throat as Lucas lowered his hands from her waist to cup her buttocks, pulling her even tighter against him, his hard shaft pressed between them.

Lucas finally broke the kiss to trail his mouth along her jaw, then down her throat. Angel moaned and threw her head back, as he licked the hollow at the base of her throat for a moment, before his lips made their way along her collarbone to her shoulder. Then she felt his hands move from where they had been kneading her ass, and his arms came up to hold her tightly as he lowered her gently to the ground.

Angel entwined a hand in his thick hair, for a moment loving the softness between her fingers, and then she pulled his head down, slipping her tongue between his lips, brushing it teasingly against his tongue before going deeper into his mouth. Her skin leaped into flames as Lucas stroked her stomach, his hand moving towards the mound of dark curls.

As his fingers moved through her curls, Angel spread her legs, opening herself up invitingly. She

gasped, breaking the kiss, as Lucas slid a finger into her warm, wet center, moving in, then out again. Angel whimpered at the loss, then with pleasure, as he slid two fingers into her while his thumb began to rub her clit. She spread her legs wider, allowing him to thrust his fingers in deeper, reaching the spot inside her that would give her the most pleasure.

When she felt him shift alongside her to lower his head and take her nipple in his mouth, Angel bit down on her lip. Lucas brought her body to a new level of pleasure by sucking on her sensitive bud. He continued to work his fingers inside her, driving her closer to that blissful edge of ecstasy.

Then, just as Angel was sure she was going over, he pulled his fingers out of her, and she cried out with disappointment and loss. Lucas lifted his head, his hazel eyes dark with passion, capturing hers. A smile played across his lips as he shifted his position, coming to lie between her thighs. Angel's breath caught in her throat as she felt the tip of his cock brush against her entrance, and she smiled up at him, lifting her hands to cup his face, unable to tear her eyes away from his.

As Lucas lowered his mouth to capture hers in a bruising, passionate kiss, he thrust into her, remaining buried inside her before moving out, then back in deeper again. Angel cried out against his mouth, as her walls stretched painfully for a moment, to accommodate his large cock. Then it was only pleasure, as he thrust rhythmically inside her. Angel lifted her hips and wrapped her legs around his waist, taking him in as deep as she could possibly get him.

With each thrust, Lucas drove them toward climax, Angel screaming out his name as she came, her walls pulsing and tightening around his shaft. Her arms came up to encircle his shoulders tightly, as he thrust into her again, bringing another orgasm that ripped through her body. He thrust one more time, bringing himself to climax with her, and as her walls tightened around his cock again, she felt his hot come explode from inside him, filling her like an empty vessel.

Lucas remained unmoving on top of her. Although already growing softer, he remained buried deep inside her. For a long time neither of them spoke, as he lowered his mouth to her neck, kissing her softly. Angel was the first to break the silence and called his name, "Lucas."

Lucas lifted his head to look down at her. The look in his eyes was cold, predatory and dangerous. His expression caused Angel's heart to beat faster, as fear raced through her blood. She lifted a hand tentatively to his face. "Lucas? What... what's wrong?" She yelped, as he grabbed her wrist painfully, pulling her hand away, a malicious grin spreading across his face, as he let her go.

His hands moved so quickly that Angel barely had time to think, as she felt them clamp around her throat like a vice. She choked, her hands flying up to try and pry Lucas' fingers loose, as she struggled desperately against him, her eyes widening with sheer panic, as he laughed at her coldly.

"This is the price you pay for betrayin' me, darlin"

Angel came awake with a scream, her hand flying to her throat, where moments before, Lucas' hands had been crushing the life out of her. Her eyes scanned her quarters wildly, as her breath came out in sharp, ragged gasps. Then she closed her eyes, as relief washed over her. It had been a nightmare.

Angel dropped her hand from her throat, and swung her legs off the edge of her bed, for a moment unable to stand, as her body shook with the shock of her nightmare. Taking several deep breaths and letting the air escape slowly, she felt her heart rate, which had been speeding out of control, finally

come back to normal.

Standing up, Angel looked at the small clock on the bedside table, surprised to see what the time was. She had come to her new quarters that afternoon and decided to take a short nap, but she'd been asleep for hours. Not that it surprised her. The past few days' events had taken a lot out of her. Angel closed her eyes and sighed.

Running a shaking hand through her hair, she moved through to the living room, carefully walking around the boxes of belongings that her sister's had brought with them from Eriadne, and which she had yet to unpack. She walked to the porthole, and looked out into the glowing red of hyperspace. Her eyes became unfocused, as she thought about Mars, yet another world she was fleeing from. Angel wished it would be just as simple for her to leave her bad memories behind, but those she would carry with her wherever the Excalibur went.

There was one memory Angel wished desperately she could leave behind, but it was the one thing she knew she would never be able to forget, her recent nightmare being glaring proof. Lucas.

He was out there somewhere. What was he doing? Was he thinking about her, wondering where she was? Was he trying to find her? Angel closed her eyes, as her heart contracted painfully. Yes, he probably was, but not for the reasons she silently wished for. Lucas would be trying to track her down to make her pay for what she did in betraying him. Angel opened her eyes and as she did so, a tear fell down her cheek. She wiped it away, cursing herself for a fool.

Her heart was longing for a man who probably wanted her dead, yet she couldn't stop missing him, loving him and wondering where he was. She should be praying that he was as far away from her as possible, yet here she was, wishing he were there with her, his arms around her waist, holding her against his chest, watching with her the beauty of hyperspace, as the Excalibur moved onto its next mission.

Angel remembered something Demon had said to her; that after every storm there was a rainbow. Demon's way of telling her that everything would work out all right in the end. But as she stared into hyperspace, Angel wondered if that would ever be possible. Although officially dead, it didn't change the fact that she was a fugitive from justice. For a moment, she felt a flare of anger and resentment towards those who'd participated in her escape, especially Gideon, the ringleader. She'd wanted to remain, to prove her innocence, so that she wouldn't have to run, but he hadn't let her, he'd taken it upon himself to take her away. Angel shook her head. She was being unfair, and deep down she knew that he and the others had been right. The odds had been stacked against her. If she'd stayed, she would have been found guilty and mind-wiped.

Angel groaned in frustration at herself and leaned her head against the cold substance of the porthole. "You have to stop thinking about him, Angel. You have to get over him and move past him, if you have any hope of getting on with the future," she whispered to herself. After a moment, she straightened and turned away. She had to try and find something else to focus on, to take her thoughts away from Lucas, but what was there? She had no idea what the future held for her. A fugitive who was to become a member of the Excalibur crew, for the moment, she couldn't even be herself. Then what did that matter? [I barely know who I am anymore!] Angel's face crumpled at that thought. Everything was so messed up inside. The only thing she knew for sure was that she was wanted for a murder that didn't commit, and was fleeing from Mars and Lucas.

Angel felt so alone. Even with her sisters there for her, she still felt terribly, painfully alone, because they both had men who loved them and who kept them warm at night, and she couldn't talk to them about

how that made her feel, she couldn't upset and worry them any more than she already had. Worst of all, the one thing that was still the same was that she loved Lucas. It was so powerful that she was lost in it, unable to stop, no matter how hard she tried, and it was tearing her apart.

Angel let out an anguished cry and fell onto the floor beside the sofa. Burying her face into a pillow, she sobbed uncontrollably.

Luke sat back on the seat in the bullet car and read over the list of duties he'd compiled for Angel. Lily had told him what Angel was able to do medically, with her knowledge of herbs and Vorlon medical technology, and had assured him that when it came to the sick and injured Angel had a healing touch. He continued reading over the list. There were some things here that he knew he would have to help her with, things he would have to teach her. That brought a small smile to Luke's face. He had to admit he was looking forward to being able to pass his knowledge on to someone, to be a mentor, while learning for himself the things that she knew.

Luke's head came up as the bullet car halted, and picking up his medical bag, he waited for the door to open. He stepped out and headed down the corridor towards Angel's quarters with two purposes in mind. He wanted to check up on her--since Angel had been brought back into the link with her sisters, and Ilas had been removed, Demon and Lily had both been a little shaky, complaining of slight dizziness and headaches. Although Angel hadn't complained, it was a safe bet that she was also suffering, maybe even more so since physically she was still weak and underweight from her ordeal on Mars. Luke also wanted to discuss the list of duties he had for her, and let her know when she could start working in Medbay.

Arriving at her door, Luke raised a hand, about to press the buzzer, when a soft, muffled sound coming from inside stopped him. Cocking his head slightly to one side, he leaned in closer to the door to try and make out the sound then straightened up, concern showing in his eyes. Inside, Angel was crying, no, sobbing, and loudly enough for him to hear the pain behind it, even through the thick metal of the door.

Without hesitation or considering what he was doing, Luke punched in his medical override. The door was hardly half open, before he rushed inside. He stopped as he saw Angel sitting on the floor beside the sofa, her legs curled underneath her, her face buried in a pillow and her whole body shuddering with each sob, so lost in her pain that she was oblivious to his entering her quarters so suddenly. The sound of her sobs tore at Luke's heart. He'd never heard such despair in tears before. Moving forward, he put his medical bag and data pad on the table and dropped to his knees behind her, gently touching her shoulder.

A sob stuck in Angel's throat, and she jumped when she felt his hand. Lifting her head, she turned, obviously surprised to find Luke beside her. Angel didn't resist as Luke pulled her into his arms and held her, while she buried her head in his shoulder and sobbed. Her arms came up and fastened tightly around his waist, and she clung to him as if he were a lifeline. He stroked her hair, his voice barely a whisper as he told her, "Just let it out sweetheart, I'm here for you, just let it all out." And she did, all her pain, sorrow, anger and despair coming out in gut wrenching sobs.

Finally, he felt Angel's sobs subside, becoming intermittent, until they stopped and she rested in his arms, her breathing ragged, until that, too, became even, and she remained still and silent. Luke pushed her away slightly, so that he could look at her. Dropping his hand from her hair, he brushed away the remnants of her tears from her hot, flushed cheeks and smiled at her, as he looked deeply into blue

eyes haunted, red and puffy from crying. "Do you want to talk about it, Angel?"

Angel looked up into Luke's eyes. She swallowed, pulling away from his arms to lean back against the sofa and shake her head. "I don't..." Her voice faltered, and she dropped her gaze to look at her hands, which she now held clasped together in her lap.

Luke watched her for a while. He was torn. He knew that Angel needed to talk, because if she bottled things up, they would fester inside her, doing more damage to her, but at the same time, he knew that pushing her could be just as harmful. He could guess what the problem was, her heart was breaking because of Lucas, and there was fear too, stemming both from the threat that Lucas was to her, and what had happened on Mars.

Reaching out his hand, Luke hooked a finger under her chin and lifted her head to look at him. "Angel, you are going to have to talk about what happened." He saw her about to disagree, so moved his hand, placing it briefly on her mouth, silencing her. Before he continued, he gave her another warm smile. "I know that you spoke about some things with Demon and Lily, but I can see that there's more. I just want you to know that when you're ready to talk, I'll be here for you, as a friend. Will you let me be that for you, a friend?"

Moving forward, Angel wrapped her arms around his shoulders and hugged him. "I'd like that Luke, I'd like that very much." She could sense him smiling as he rested his chin on the top of her head.

Inhaling a deep shaking breath, Angel found her voice. "I'm sorry, it's just too painful right now to talk, but thank you. You'll never know how much it means to me that you want to be my friend. Especially after my actions contributed to you and Lily almost losing John."

"Don't. Don't you blame yourself for what happened to John. You didn't fire that shot, Lucas did." Luke stopped as he saw her face contort with pain and guilt. Clearing his throat, he stood up, pulling Angel up with him, then gently taking her by her shoulders, he guided her to the sofa and sat beside her. "I know you aren't ready to talk, but will you listen to what I have to say?"

He watched as Angel chewed her lower lip uncertainly, then slowly she nodded. Smiling softly, Luke went on, "We didn't get a chance to get to know each other on Eriadne, but Lily has told me a lot about you, so I feel in some way that I know you, and what you might be feeling right now." Luke stopped, wondering if he was the right person to talk to Angel like this.

Angel must have seen the hesitation on Luke's face, as she reached out her hand and placed it on his. "Please, Luke, go on," her voice was softly pleading.

Luke nodded and patted her hand. "I can imagine all the guilt that you're feeling right now, mixed with heartache and painful memories, but I want you to try and get past them. I know that's easier said than done. You've suffered so much, Angel. It's time to stop the suffering. You can begin by forgiving yourself. Guilt is a wasted emotion. All it does is suck your soul dry, leaving you empty. A person can't live like that."

Luke saw Angel lower her head and shift in her seat. Taking hold of her hand and waiting for her to look back at him, he continued, never letting his eyes stray from hers. "You have to stop blaming yourself for what Lucas did. You may have brought him into our lives, but you didn't make him do the terrible things he did. Accept the part you played and forgive yourself for that and that alone. No guilt for what happened to John, or to Dureena's baby. That wasn't your fault. No one blames you, Angel, for what Lucas did. Even Dureena believes that you didn't know what would happen, and she's

forgiven you, remember?"

Angel listened as Luke spoke, and a small part of her, deep inside, began to believe what he was saying. It was the small part that knew her only to be guilty of believing the lies that Lucas had told, and of letting herself be manipulated and blinded by him. Still, the guilty part was stronger, but maybe with time and help, she could finally stop feeling that way. [Just maybe.] Of course, that still left the other problem. How could she stop loving Lucas?

Angel came out of her thoughts, to find that Luke had stopped talking and was watching her with concern. "Are you OK, Angel?"

She nodded. "Sorry. I was just thinking about what you were saying."

"And?" Luke's voice was low and coaxing, his eyebrow raised questioningly.

She smiled past a shaky sigh. "I... I hear what you're saying and maybe you're right, but I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself. There's a part of me that tells me I'm not to blame, but the part that says I'm guilty is stronger." She smiled sadly and shrugged.

Luke lifted a hand to cup her face. "Well then, together, and with help from everyone who cares about you, we'll make the part that believes stronger, until you forgive yourself."

Angel leaned into Luke's hand, feeling the warmth and gentleness in that simple touch. "I hope so, Luke." She sighed and closed her eyes before withdrawing.

Luke reached up his hand to gently caress her cheek and get her to look at him. "It's not just the guilt is it?"

Angel opened her eyes and shook her head. "No. I..." Her voice broke, and she had to clear her throat and swallow away the lump that had formed in her throat. "Getting over the guilt sounds easy compared to... compared to..." Again, her voice stumbled to a halt.

"Compared to getting over Lucas," finished Luke gently. Angel nodded.

Luke was silent for a while, trying to find words that could help her. "I wish there was something I could do that would help you with that. I know you're still in love with him, and I imagine that there's a part of you that desperately wants to stop feeling that way, because it hurts too much. The only thing I can tell you, Angel, is that it will get better in time. Time will pass, and you'll meet someone, a man who'll be worthy of your love, and who'll give you the love you deserve. Then your feelings for Lucas will fade."

"You really think that will help, Luke?" she asked, tentatively.

"Yes, I do." Luke smiled "And I want you to believe that everything else will work out fine. I know that you're afraid that Lucas will return one day, to pay you back for betraying him. Just remember that you have good people, your sisters, John, Matt and I, who will never let him hurt you again. If he tries to come for you, we'll be in front of you, protecting you."

The more Luke spoke, the more Angel's spirits lifted. With his friendship, maybe she could learn to

forgive herself, maybe move past all the bad things that had happened and start living her life again.

Moving forward, she hugged him and remained in his arms, resting her head against his shoulder. After a quiet moment, she pulled away and kissed him on the cheek. "I didn't think it was possible to feel positive, but what you just said has given me more hope than I've had in a long time." Luke smiled again, and it amazed Angel how happy it made her feel, to see that sweet smile of his directed at her.

"That's good to hear, Angel. Don't spend your time fearing what might happen in the future, just concentrate on getting past the guilt, forgiving yourself and taking care of yourself."

Angel hugged Luke again, her voice husky with emotion as she whispered against his shoulder. "Thank you." Clearing her throat softly, she looked past Luke at the door, then back at him, smiling at him quizzically. "Luke? How did you get inside, without me opening the door for you?"

Luke chuckled softly. "As Ship's Doctor, I have an override code on all quarters, only to be used in case of an emergency. When I heard you crying through the door... Well, I decided that it was an emergency."

Angel smiled. "Well, I was in trouble, and you arrived just in time to rescue me." She looked at him again, conveying her gratitude. "Although your timing was perfect, something makes me think that you weren't just passing by my quarters when you heard me?"

Luke shook his head and pointed to the medical bag and data pad. "Demon and Lily are still pretty wobbly, after Ilas was removed from your link. I came by to make sure that you were all right. I was worried that you might be affected a little worse than them, and I also wanted to talk to you about when you can start in Medbay, and what your duties will be."

For the next half hour, Angel allowed Luke to examine her, admitting that, like Demon and Lily, she still felt dizzy and was experiencing headaches. Then he gave her a quick check up, pleased with her weight gain, but instructing her to continue eating a high protein and carbohydrate diet. He also gave her a bottle of vitamins, telling her she was to take those daily, to build up her immune system, as it had taken a beating during her ordeal on Mars.

Once satisfied that her condition was improved, and still improving, Luke packed away his medical bag, while Angel went into the small kitchen and prepared them some herbal tea. He sat back and watched her move around the kitchen, pleased to see her face less contoured with lines of pain and sadness.

Angel returned with the tea and, placing the tray on the table, she sat beside him and poured them each a cup. After handing Luke his, she picked up her cup, sat back on the seat, tucked her legs underneath her and listened, as Luke went on to tell her she could start in Medbay as soon as she was feeling up to it. He showed her the data pad with the list of duties he believed she would be able to perform.

They'd been talking for an hour when Luke announced that he had to leave. "I'm sorry, Angel, but I must get back to Medbay." Angel looked up at the wall clock and gasped.

"Of course! They must be wondering where you are." She looked guilty for having kept him there so long.

Luke patted her shoulder as he stood. "If they'd needed me, they would have called me on my commlink. Besides, I wouldn't have left any sooner anyway." He smiled, communicating without words, that he'd been happy to stay.

Angel stood and watched, as Luke picked up his medical bag and data pad, then followed him to the door. He turned to look down at her, wondering if he should leave, worried that once he was gone, those negative thoughts and feelings would return. She must have sensed the reason for his hesitation, because she smiled and took his hand.

"I'll be fine Luke. Thank you for all that you did, it's helped more than you could ever know."

"Are you sure?" He still wasn't comfortable about leaving her alone. [Maybe I'll call Lily and ask her to come keep her company for a while]

She nodded. "Positive. Stop looking so worried, Doc. I'm going to do my best to follow your advice, and not think about bad things. In fact, I'll be too busy." She paused to look around the room, pointing at the boxes. "I'm going to get these things unpacked and maybe rearrange a few things around here to make it feel more like home."

"I like the sound of that. But please, if you start to feel down, call me and I'll be right over. I meant what I said before. I want to be your friend and to help you through everything."

Angel closed her eyes for a moment, forcing back tears. Opening them, she raised herself on tiptoes and kissed Luke's cheek. "I will. I promise." She moved away from him smiling again. "Now, you'd better go, before they send out a search party for you."

Luke laughed and walked forward as the door opened, but he stopped and turned as Angel called out to him. "Luke? Lily and John are very lucky to have you." He stood looking at her for a moment, then smiling his thanks, he said goodbye and walked out of the door.

Angel stood unmoving, then broke into a grin. Just before he'd turned away, she'd seen a blush flare across his cheeks at her words. [That's so sweet.] Angel turned, still smiling, to look at her quarters. It was time to get busy. "Well, let's not make a liar out of you, Angel. Get to work unpacking those boxes and get this place feeling more like home."

She cleared away the teapot and cups, then turned her attention to the boxes and began to unpack the items that her sisters had brought, her love for them glowing like a source of warmth and light within her. They'd brought with them exactly what she would have chosen. Smiling, she removed her Balls of Sight, remembering times when she'd used them, caressing the cool shimmering surfaces, before placing them gently on the table. Then she went through the other boxes, unpacking books and other items.

More than an hour later, she was standing in the middle of the room, surveying her handy-work. Angel couldn't help but smile, as she thought about what Demon's reaction would be when she saw how neat everything was. [Well, time for a change, no more chaos.] Books were neatly arranged on the shelf by the door. Ornaments now resided on different surfaces around the room, and her Balls of Sight lay safely on the small table in the corner. The sofa and chairs had been moved around the room, until she was satisfied with their placement. The only thing that hadn't been packed away was her tapestry, still lying across the back of the sofa. That she would hang later in her bedroom. She also had to find a place for her Grimoire. She eyed it with love; she still loved it, despite her feelings

that magic had recently caused her nothing but trouble. Not all of it was bad, and she was determined that in the future, she would only ever use it to help others.

Bending down, she picked it up and held it against her. Until she could find an appropriate and worthy place, she would keep it safely in her bedroom, stored away in her cupboard. The sound of the door buzzer stopped her as she walked toward the bedroom. Turning, Angel frowned. [Who could that be?] If it had been one of her sisters, they would have called through their link, to let her know that they were outside, and she couldn't think of anyone else who might want to see her. Then she broke into a smile. [Luke] It could only be Luke, she had seen that he was hesitant about leaving her alone, he was probably coming back to make sure that she was all right.

"Open." She called softly, as she walked to the table and put the Grimoire down. She looked up, about to tease Luke for being a mother hen, but her face froze when she saw who was standing there.

"Can I come in?" Gideon was dreading this meeting, but felt he had no choice. If he and Angel were to even try to live in close proximity, he had to do this. She nodded and stepped back, but he could see how the color had drained from her face as she realized who had come to visit her. He'd been hanging around the corridor for half an hour, trying to decide whether he should see this through or not.

Gideon walked into the living area, looked around and smiled. He turned to Angel, still smiling. "I should have known. But how in hell did they manage to get this much stuff on board without me finding out?" He paused as he saw the expression on her face. "Angel, it's OK. I'm not mad, not with you or your sisters. In fact, I admire their ingenuity, and I bet I know who the ringleader was, as usual." He continued to smile, hoping that he could reassure her and calm her, but considering their history, he wondered why she'd even let him through the door.

When Angel finally spoke, her voice was almost a whisper. "If you're betting on Demon, you'd be right." She managed a weak smile, before continuing, "I think Demon brought all my books with her. She has so many of her own that a few more wouldn't be noticed. Lily brought my tapestry," she gestured at the sofa where the large tapestry was laid, "rolled up inside one of her own, and Ilas brought my other things."

Gideon moved across the room to inspect the tapestry, remembering how it had looked in Angel's rooms on Eriadne. The only times he'd been there, he'd barely noticed the décor, but the tapestry had stood out. Looking around, he was also surprised by how tidy the room was. Maybe she'd turned over a new leaf. "Would you like me to help you hang it?"

Angel flinched and shook her head. "It's OK, I want it in the bedroom..." she trailed off into silence. Well, it was hardly surprising if she didn't want him setting foot in there.

Still searching for a neutral subject, well aware that he was avoiding the reason he'd come to her quarters, Gideon turned to the computer screen. "Has anyone shown you how to use the entertainment functions?" Angel shook her head, so he spent the next few minutes showing her how to access information and entertainment from the ship's computer. She quickly grasped what she needed to do, and he smiled to see her pleasure, once she realized that she could access a vast library of books, vids and music. The tension between them eased, as Gideon showed her the various functions she asked about, including accessing the medical library so she could start on her studies and get her knowledge up to date.

He watched Angel as she played with the system, finding out more about how to use it and what was available. She was still too thin, but had, at least, started to regain the weight she'd lost. Her physical fragility and the shorter haircut combined to make her look younger than Gideon knew her to be. She looked almost childlike. He found this hard to reconcile with the sexy, siren image she'd projected when on Eriadne, but she was still one of the most beautiful women he'd ever known. He pushed that thought away.

After a few moments, Angel turned to him and smiled tentatively. "I'm sure you didn't come here just to show me how to use the computer, Captain. What can I do for you?"

Gideon took a deep breath, and gestured to the chair in the corner of the room. "Do you mind if I sit?" He deliberately chose the chair, so she could sit on the sofa, keeping her distance from him.

Angel nodded, then her hand flew to her mouth. "I'm sorry, I've been very rude. Can I get you some tea? Or coffee?" If their current situation weren't so difficult, it would have been laughable. Considering the things they'd done together, behaving like strangers meeting for the first time at a formal tea party was bizarre to say the least.

He shook his head. "No thanks." Gideon took another deep breath, before launching into what he needed to say. "I wanted to see if you'd got everything you needed. I hadn't expected all this." He waved his hand at the contents of the room. "And I wanted to see if you were OK. Luke told me that you were recovering well, but I wanted to see for myself."

Angel was staring at the floor between her feet, not meeting his gaze as she whispered. "I'm fine, thank you. Much better now." She looked up at him. "Was that all? It's kind of you to ask."

Gideon surged to his feet. "Kind? *Kind*? Oh hell, Angel, I wish to God that just once I had been kind to you." He saw her flinch back from him, as she sat on the sofa, frightened by his sudden movement. He backed off and stood as far across the room from her as he could get. "If I'd been kind, maybe you wouldn't look so terrified every time you see me. Maybe you wouldn't flinch if I move towards you. Angel, I'm sorry. That's what I came here for, to say that I'm sorry. To apologize for everything I've ever done to you. There's hardly a word or an action that I don't regret, so I'm sorry."

Angel's eyes widened as he spoke, and when he ran out of words, she looked up in puzzlement. "Sorry? For what?"

Gideon laughed bitterly. "For everything. For damn near raping you in the library, for being so cruel to you at that dinner, for making love to you in the orchard and for everything I said afterwards. For following you to your rooms that night and hitting you, for leaving you in such distress afterwards. But mostly for having you arrested on Mars. If I hadn't done that, you would never have been charged with Nikarran's murder and we wouldn't have had to..." Gideon didn't know how to finish that sentence. What had he done? Rescued her? Kidnapped her? What was certain was that yet again he'd forced Angel into doing something she didn't want to do. Another thing for him to feel guilty about.

Angel stared at Gideon in open-mouthed amazement. It had never occurred to her that he would feel guilty about the things he'd done. Yes, some of them had made her very angry, but she'd always felt that she'd deserved his anger and contempt. If she hadn't been so jealous, and cast that stupid spell in the first place, allowing Gideon's body to be taken over and used by Lucas, none of the appalling events would have followed. Everything that happened was her fault, not his.

When he ran out of words she spoke quickly. "I'm not afraid of you. I know that you'd never hurt me." Angel carried on quickly, over-riding Gideon's attempts at protest. "Let me finish! You say you nearly raped me in the library, but that's not true. I wanted that as much as you did. What hurt far more were your words afterwards, and I know that I provoked those by calling you Lucas. That was unforgivable. It's Lucas I'm afraid of, not you. It's just that when I see you, sometimes, just for a second, I think that you're him. I know that one day he's going to kill me for betraying him, so when I see your face, I think it's him come to get me." She could see how much her comment had pained him, so rushed on. "Oh please! I can't help it right now, but I know that I'll get over this. Give me a little time, and I'll get past it."

Gideon took a step towards her and Angel couldn't help herself, she sat back in the sofa, moving away from him. He stopped abruptly and gave her a pained smile. "OK, I'll try to remember that it's not me who frightens you, but Angel, I'll never let Lucas hurt you. One day, I'm going to catch up with that bastard and space him, then we'll all sleep more soundly at night."

Angel wanted to scream at him, begging him to stop, pleading with him to leave Lucas alone. While a small, silent voice inside her told her that Gideon was right, listening to him threatening to kill the man she loved was torture. But she could never admit to Gideon that she still loved Lucas. She hurried on. "The other things you were sorry for... Yes, you were unkind at the dinner, but the things I said to you in the orchard were far worse, and when you hit me, I was out of control, attacking you. I don't hold that against you." Angel swallowed hard, forcing her next words out. She told him the truth, but it was a difficult truth to admit.

"I even understand why you felt you had to have me arrested. What I did when I brought Lucas back... Dureena says she's forgiven me, but I'm not sure that I'll ever forgive myself. I knew it was too easy..." She stopped, unable to continue forcing words past the lump in her throat that threatened to choke her, trying desperately to remember Luke's words that had momentarily eased her guilt.

Gideon slowly walked towards her, then knelt in front of her, gently taking her hands in his. "It wasn't your fault, Angel, we all know that now. You have to forgive yourself and move on, but can you forgive me?"

Angel looked down at Gideon, kneeling at her feet and her heart melted. She took one hand away from his and reached out to touch his lips gently with one finger. "Shhh. Of course I can. If you can forgive me for the awful things I did, when you first arrived on Eriadne."

Gideon reached for her hand and turned it so he could kiss it gently. Then he smiled up at her, gentle and understanding, a smile Angel had always wanted to see on Lucas' face but never had, the smile she saw so often when Gideon looked at Demon. It almost broke Angel's heart, and she felt the tears start to trickle from her eyes.

Gideon reached up to brush them away, then spoke softly. "Maybe we can forgive each other and stop fighting. I know how much that would mean to Deborah, and we both love her enough to want to do that for her, but don't think that I'm doing this just for her. This is for you and me, too. I really am sorry, Angel, for everything. I never even thanked you for helping your sisters get me out of that damned Box. Thank you." He lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it again.

Angel squeezed his hands where they held hers. "And I haven't thanked you for getting me out of the Mars Security station. I was being stubborn and silly, you were right." She sniffed back her tears and slowly pulled her hands away from his. "I don't want to fight with you, Matthew. I know how much

it upsets Demon when we fight, and you're right, I do love her and want to please her." She managed a small mischievous smile as she said, "Look, I even tidied up my room. That'll make her *very* happy."

Gideon laughed and stood, looking down at her, smiling gently. "Maybe. If you can keep it that way. But you know damned well that the first time she finds an ornament at the wrong angle or a book in the wrong place, she'll growl at you. Don't tell her I said so, but her thing about tidiness gets a bit much at times. I find that I'm getting messier in my own quarters."

Angel giggled. "Why do you think that my rooms were always such a mess? Just a little sister rebelling, I'm afraid." She stood and held her hand out to Gideon. "Shall we try to be friends?"

Gideon shook her hand, saying, "Friends," then said goodbye and left.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Angel collapsed on the sofa, sobbing. Her nipples were hard and her juices flowed with her desire for him. Seeing him, smelling him, touching him and worst of all, seeing that gentle smile, had roused her passions, bringing back vivid memories of her dream about Lucas. She wanted Gideon more now than she'd ever wanted him before. Now, when he was most unobtainable. Angel would never betray her sister, but she wanted him, oh God, how she wanted him.

Gideon leaned on the wall outside Angel's quarters trying to get himself under control. He hoped to God that she hadn't noticed the raging erection that her looks and touch had given him. It had taken every bit of control he had not to pull Angel into his arms and start making love to her. He took a deep breath, pulled himself away from the wall and headed for the gym. That was where he'd told Deborah he was going, and where he might just be able to work off some of his feelings. He didn't dare go back to the rooms he shared with his wife, until he'd calmed down. She'd read him like a book as soon as he stepped through the door.

He forced himself to walk normally, at least until he got to the bullet car. Finding it empty, Gideon sank onto a seat and dropped his head to his hands, wondering if there were any way in which he could make his life more complicated.

Lily lay on her side on the couch in the living room, her legs across John's thighs and her head in Luke's lap. They were watching a movie on one of the many entertainment channels, but Lily wasn't really concentrating on what was happening on the screen, she was just enjoying the feeling of John's hand caressing her calves underneath her skirt, and Luke softly stroking her hair. Suddenly, she had an idea, and in one swift movement swung her feet to the ground and stood, then with silent, bare-footed steps crossed towards the bedroom. "Don't go anywhere, I'll be back in a moment," she told her men, smiling enigmatically.

John and Luke exchanged a look that showed each was as clueless as the other, then grinned and turned their attention back to the movie.

Quite a few moments had passed, several minutes in fact, but Lily still hadn't emerged from the

bedroom. Luke was just about to ask John whether he had any idea what Lily was up to, when he saw movement from the corner of his eye. He turned his head, and his heart nearly stopped at the sight he beheld. Lily was walking past him, clad in a ground-length something, [Well, 'nothing' would be more exact,] of emerald green chiffon and black and green lace. Both this and the matching negligee had a slight train. The chiffon was so sheer, he thought it would turn to dust when touched, but though it clung to her body down to the hips, the lace was strategically placed so it enhanced rather than blatantly displayed Lily's curves, leaving room for his fantasy, which was running wild as he raked his eyes over her tiny, perfectly female body.

Luke was distantly aware that his mouth hung open and wouldn't have been surprised to find his tongue lying on the floor. He was just grateful that he wasn't drooling, and thanked whatever God or Goddess was responsible that his pants had a loose fit. Had he worn a pair of jeans, they'd have killed him right about now.

His eyes followed Lily's slow, deliberate movements like slaves, when she put one foot on the table, then stepped up onto it, her legs emerging from the long slits in the front that ran up to her thighs. The top was halter-neck, and the décolleté wide and low-cut, showing her snake tattoo and her cleavage to advantage. [God, I just want to bury my face between those breasts and never move again.] Luke quickly shut his mouth, before he really started drooling, when he noticed Lily's nipples and the dark areola showing through a transparent bit of the lace. She obviously wasn't wearing any underwear, and only a triangle of black and green lace hid the V of curly red hair between her thighs from view.

He dragged his eyes upwards from the part of her body that was so conveniently close to eye level, wandering past her breasts to her face, and the look in those incredible green eyes was enough to make his blood boil. After the previous stimulation, it had to be close to evaporating now! Lily smiled lasciviously, then directed her gaze to the other end of the couch.

A soft moan from his right told Luke that John wasn't any better off than he was.

John thought his head would explode, [And something else will blow before that!] as he found himself reduced to a slobbering idiot, by the sight of Lily in that incredible outfit. He couldn't help a soft moan escaping him, when her eyes met his, almost overwhelmed by his desire for her. He just wanted to climb up on that table and make love to her, yet he remained seated, like Luke, transfixed by their red-haired lover, who now turned around. When she stood with her back to them, she slid the negligee off her shoulders, slowly, deliberately, inch by inch, until she finally let it drop onto the table. Her hair still covered her back to mid-thigh, but she lifted her hands to the back of her neck and languidly pulled up the mass of red curls.

[Oh, my...] John was robbed of coherent thought, when he saw how low the dress was cut in the back, obscenely low almost; any lower and the dimple just above her buttocks would have been visible. The chiffon was gathered along the cleft between her round cheeks to flow down into the short train, the multiple layers still sheer enough to give a definite idea of what lay beneath them. John felt his cock pulse as ever more blood was pumped into it, much more and he'd have a permanent condition! [Priapism,] his mind provided the correct name, but John's attention was elsewhere.

Lily let her hair down to cover her bare back again and completed her turn to look at both men, her green eyes burning as she held out her hands to them in invitation. "Come," she whispered, her voice husky with desire.

[Please don't say that word,] John silently pleaded. He'd never thought covering such a short distance on foot could be so awkward and difficult, but finally he and Luke stood before their mistress. Lily cupped their faces in her hands and leaned forward to kiss John, softly at first, then more passionately, opening his lips with hers. He entwined his tongue with hers as it entered his mouth, closing his eyes as he felt his head spin with the sheer intensity of the kiss, his arms coming up as if of their own volition, to pull her closer. As soon as his hands touched her, Lily withdrew her mouth. John nearly stumbled and blinked a few times, trying to regain some sort of balance, physical as well as emotional and mental. Lily gave him one last scorching look, licking her lips, then turned to Luke and covered his mouth with hers.

Lily pulled back from Luke, giving him the slightest smile as she straightened, then took his hand and put it onto the small decorative metal clasp that connected the halter-neck strap to the dress. "Undo it," she said, and after a moment, she felt a tug and then a loosening in the strap. Luke pushed it back over her right shoulder, making her skin tingle where his hand slid upwards, then down again to where the stiffer lace material still covered her breasts. John slowly pulled the strap forward and down over her left shoulder, and after giving her a teasing smile, down further.

Simultaneously, Luke moved his hand down her right breast, the chiffon and lace sliding over her hard nipples, sending waves of pleasure to her center and quickening her breath considerably. Lily pressed John and Luke's heads against her breasts as soon as they were exposed completely, and the two men attacked her nipples, sucking and nipping, flicking their tongues at them, drawing gasps and moans from her throat while their hands roamed her bare back, her ass, belly, and thighs which were still covered by the nightgown.

Lily closed her eyes and threw her head back, panting, for a moment allowing herself to get lost in the sensual impressions flooding her system, but then pulled back and stretched her arms out for them to lift her down to the floor. After they did, Lily let her hands run down their arms and holding onto their biceps, lifted first her right, then her left foot and used them to push the low table away.

Letting go of their arms, Lily ordered John and Luke to undress each other, slowly, in a low whisper. While they did, she walked around them, feasting her eyes on the sight, kissing and nipping newly revealed parts of their bodies, pressing her bare breasts against them, letting her fingers roam their naked skin, and run through their hair. The nightgown still clung to her hips, and she rubbed the sheer fabric against their legs and butts. Finally, John and Luke stood before her, completely naked, their cocks firm and erect, and she just looked at them, licking her lips as she deliberated her next moves.

Lily could see the desire in her lovers' eyes, could feel it permeating the air between and around them, mixing with her own like an exotic perfume that made her head spin, her heart beat faster, and her juices flow. [Dear Mother, I just want to pounce on them and... but not yet.]

"Sit," Lily said, then pulled the nightgown up and over her head with deliberate, slow moves, like a stripper, and let it slide to the floor beside her. After giving her lovers a moment to look at her, she stepped forward and sank to her knees in front of the couch, resting her hands on their thighs. Looking from one to the other she traced her fingers upwards, drawing languid circles on their skin. John and Luke gasped when she closed her hands around their hard cocks, and Lily started stroking and caressing them, heating them up and cooling them down again, teasing the two men mercilessly.

She could feel the wetness between her thighs increase as they grew harder still, could feel her vagina

pulse in time with her lovers' moans and gasps. Tickling their testicles lightly, she withdrew her hands, but before they could protest, she'd jumped up onto the couch. Kneeling between them with her back to John, she directed them until Luke was sitting on his heels at his end of the couch, while John knelt between her legs behind her.

Lily could feel John's fingers rake down her back as she bent forward, rubbing her ass against his erect cock, and the moment he entered her, she lowered her mouth onto Luke's erection, her tongue swirling around it, drawing a loud moan from him. Lily timed her movements with John's, and soon they were moving as one in a steady rhythm. With each of John's thrusts, Lily took Luke deeper and deeper inside her mouth until she felt the tip of his cock touch the back of her throat. Moving up and down, she kept her tongue in motion along and around Luke's shaft, lingering at the head for a moment, using the underside of her tongue to stroke rapidly across the "V" just below the head. She knew both her men enjoyed this, and Luke's gasp proved her right. Lily gave him a wicked grin, then descended on him again.

As the rhythm was building, John suddenly reached around with his right hand and slid it between her wet folds, gently rubbing her clit. Lily moaned deep in her throat, the vibrations exciting Luke even more. His hands entwined in her hair as he grew closer to climax, and he began thrusting into her mouth. John pounded into her hot, wet center, and she could feel the muscles in her vagina start to contract, pushing him over the edge, and Luke was only a second behind, emptying himself into her mouth. After she'd swallowed all of his essence, Lily slowly pulled her mouth back along his cock, cleaning off any remains with her lips and tongue, making Luke shudder one last time.

They all collapsed in a panting heap on the couch, trying to catch their collective breath. Suddenly Lily lifted her head and said, her chest still heaving with deep breathing, "I guess we'd better move to the bedroom before we fall asleep on the couch."

Soon, they lay snuggled together in their big bed, and Lily felt warm and cherished. She sighed deeply.

"Happy?" Luke asked in a soft voice that sent a shiver up her spine.

Lily smiled. "How could I not be?" She opened her eyes to look at Luke, then at John, her smile growing. "We are finally complete."

Her eyes were drawn to her tapestry that they'd hung on the ceiling since it was too big for the walls. "That's you," she whispered. "Sweet Face," she indicated the black wolf, "and Sad Eyes," and then the white one.

"And I always thought you were the wild one in our relationship," John murmured, giving her a teasing smile.

"Well..." Lily said, tracing her index finger along his jaw, "You two certainly bring out the beast in me." She lightly scratched his cheek with her fingernail and giggled when John growled and playfully bit her finger.

"There's no doubt that you do the same to us," Luke said, pulling Lily's head back and down to gently nip the tip of her nose. His heart skipped a beat at the loving smile she gave him before leaning her

head on his chest. Gently stroking Lily's hair, he let his mind drift, musing on how unlikely such an outcome had seemed at their first encounter. Never before had Luke met a woman who embodied the term "sizzling" as perfectly as Lily, and not just because of her coloring.

He'd seen many redheads who looked nice or ugly, and some just plain dull, but none of them had radiated such promise of fire beneath the calm, beautiful surface. Being around her was like living at a spot where the continental crust was thinner than usual. It might be stable most of the time and the hot springs and geysers would keep you warm and comfortable even in wintertime, but you had to be willing to live with the risk of the occasional earthquake or volcanic eruption which could be quite dangerous, as he had experienced himself. Yet, he knew that he would never want to move away, because he loved and wanted only her. Lily was his heart, his home.

Luke's eyes were drawn to the black head resting next to Lily's red one, and he couldn't resist reaching out and ruffling its usual crispness, grinning at the younger man as he looked up at Luke and raised an eyebrow, then grinned and laid his head on Lily's shoulder again. Luke had never felt anything indicating the slightest tendency towards sexual relations with other men, but at some point during their first visit to Eriadne, the bond between John and Lily, and himself and Lily, had expanded to connect the two men as well, and had grown stronger ever since. While the feelings they shared were different from those they each shared with Lily, they weren't any weaker. [Every one of us has a different, unique relationship to each of the other two, but only together are we whole.] Luke smiled. [I must have done something right in my life to deserve so much happiness.]

From the day the Corps had taken him from his parents, there hadn't ever been a time in his life when John had felt more complete than at this moment. He'd never had any long-term relationships and had almost resigned himself to the fact he'd never have one, let alone a family, when he'd met Lily. Before that day, he'd never found anyone he could trust enough to open up to. [Well, with one exception, but I spent enough time thinking about her in the lonely years that followed.] He pushed the memories of that brief time aside.

The physical attraction had been obvious from the first time he'd looked into those amazing green eyes, but he'd soon found that he'd fallen head over heels for the lively redhead. Her blocking of his telepathy, though the experience hadn't been entirely pleasant for him, had allowed him to open himself more than he ever had before, to relax from the constant need to guard himself, from the worry about reading someone's mind accidentally. Despite his inability to feel the slightest emotion from those around him, he'd somehow never doubted her, never even asked himself if he could trust her or not, because his heart had known.

The first time they'd left Eriadne, he'd been able to delude himself, to pretend that he hadn't left a piece of his heart behind, but as the day of Luke's departure from the Excalibur had come closer, John had suddenly realized that he'd clung to their mutual bond to prevent himself from facing the truth. That night he'd broken down, going from ranting and raving, cursing all Gods and Goddesses for taking everyone he cared for from him, to breaking into wracking sobs, and back to raging, until he'd exhausted himself completely.

He'd been unable to face Luke from then on, and only their sharing before the doctor's departure had helped to soothe the wounds and give him back some hope, hope of one day seeing Luke and Lily again. After their second visit, knowing that Luke had stayed behind with the tiny redhead, who was carrying their children, had been both comforting and made him feel guilty, for John knew that he should have been with them too. He had dreaded the end of his shifts, when he'd have to go back to

his quiet, lonely quarters and sleep in his empty, cold bunk. There had been times when John thought he'd go crazy with missing them, nights when he'd cried himself into an exhausted sleep, and days when he couldn't even care enough to cry anymore, when he'd seemed to just fall into a bottomless pit of desperation.

During quiet spells on the bridge, Gideon would sometimes catch John staring out into space as the Captain walked up to his XO with some question or order, and looking into his Captain's eyes, John had recognized the same look he saw in his own every time he looked in the mirror. They had never spoken about it, merely exchanging the tiniest nod or a sad smile to acknowledge that they weren't alone with their pain, before going back to business.

Only the thought that his family was on Eriadne, waiting for him to come back, had kept John going. It had become almost unbearable after their babies had been born--two more loved ones to miss. Matthew had told him on Alwyn's ship, during their trip back to the Excalibur with the injured Lucas Buck, *"Hold onto this, John. Just hold onto the images and the memories and we'll find a way to be with them."*

So John had held on to the memories as tightly as he'd held on to the cube with *their* images during his lonely nights. As tightly as he'd held onto the promise Gideon had made on that same trip, in that same conversation, *"And we're going to find a way to make it happen. Just give me some time, OK? Don't rush into decisions that you'll have a lifetime to regret,"* because he knew that his Captain and friend always kept his word, come hell or high water. [And he's outdone himself this time,] John thought and smiled softly, sending his love to Luke and Lily who answered in kind, despite being in a half slumber already. Closing his eyes, John soon drifted off to sleep, still smiling.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

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