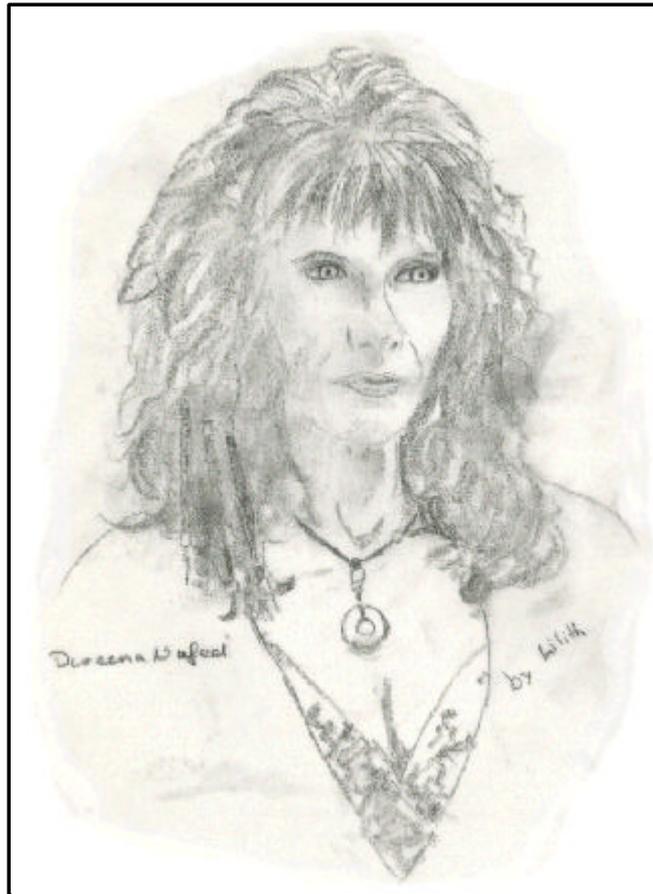


The Witches of Eriadne: Double, Double - Part 3: Changing Partners

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Dureena Nafeel by Lilith

Chapter 1

Dureena turned and looked at the door of the cell as it closed behind her. Solid metal, no handle or keyhole on the inside and a narrow slot at the foot of the door through which she assumed [Hoped!] they would provide food -- little scope for escape there. Although there was a narrow slit in the side of the door, they had taken all metal objects from her, and she had little other than her clothes and ingenuity to work with.

[So what else is there I can use?] She looked carefully at the contents of the cell. No light fixtures; the ceiling gave off a uniform glow. Hygiene facilities were provided but close examination showed them to be molded from the stone of the wall -- no moving parts to disassemble. The bed was the

same; a molded shelf protruding from the wall, with a single blanket covering it. [This could be tough.]

She'd been in other cells in her time and escaped from a few, but none had given her so little to work with. She sat on the bed and thought hard about the tools available to her and how she could use them. Some time later she smiled and removed her right boot. Bending the boot backwards and forwards she could feel the metal shank that ran up the centre of the sole, providing structure and support. Maybe they hadn't taken everything away that she could use.

There was no natural light in her cell, so she couldn't measure the time by the sun, but her own internal clock kept track of the passing hours. After the first 10 or so hours alone she was suddenly swept by an overwhelming sensation of sexual arousal. [Where did that come from?] She had no idea why she should start feeling that way for no reason and the sensation disturbed her deeply. She would normally require the presence of members of both other sexes of her species before she could become aroused. But there were no other survivors of her race, so how could she be reacting in this way? The feelings only increased her anxiety at being imprisoned alone. Her people were gregarious by nature and to be deprived of all other company for prolonged periods was torture for her.

The disturbing feelings were repeated throughout the night, and on into the following day and night as she worked at disassembling her boot. Unfortunately, it was extremely well made and proved exceptionally difficult to destroy. Three times during that period they'd slid a molded plastic tray under the door, which contained food. She'd examined the tray carefully to see if it had any potential as a weapon or a tool, but although extremely tough, it was very lightweight and she soon returned to her task. By the time she'd worked the metal shank from the centre of her boot her fingernails were broken and bleeding, and she was sure she'd cracked some enamel off a tooth, but finally she held the narrow piece of metal in her hands.

Working it into the gap at the side of the door, she started work on the lock. Her internal clock told her that it was now early in the morning and she'd been imprisoned alone for over 36 hours. She was finding it difficult to control the shaking in her hands as she worked at the lock. She knew that she was losing control and that soon her claustrophobia, her loneliness, and the strange sexual arousal would overwhelm her. She fought to bring herself back under control and continued to work. After several more hours her patience and control were finally rewarded as the lock gave way under the pressure she exerted. The door swung open.

She emerged slowly into the corridor, checking to see if guards were present to witness her escape. The corridor was deserted. Moving swiftly to the next cell, she started to work on the lock of the door. It was easier this time as she had access to the handle and keyhole on the outside of the door. She could hear groaning from inside the cell and wondered if any of the Excalibur crew had been injured during their capture. When the door finally opened she was appalled by what she saw.

The man and woman in the cell were coupled in an act that on her world was regarded as one of complete intimacy that should only be carried out in total privacy. The man knelt behind the woman and was thrusting deeply into her. For Zanderi that meant they were engaged in procreation, not recreation. This was not to be interrupted under any circumstances. She slammed the door shut and locked it again. That should prevent their interruption by others.

Deeply embarrassed, she didn't dare open any further cells in case she was met with the same sight. Perhaps humans had to mate at particular times regardless of their personal circumstances and who they were with. That was the only explanation Dureena could think of for why the crew could behave in such a way at that time.

She heard movement from the far end of the corridor and turned to see a guard standing with an armful of the plastic food trays. He dropped them and started to run towards her as she fled. She lost him quickly in the labyrinth of the cellars of the castle, but was soon completely lost herself.

Demon stood in the main guardroom with the Guard Captain, holding the shreds of the boot that Dureena had left behind in her cell. He had explained that only Dureena had escaped and that she was now loose in the castle. They had lost her quickly and needed their mistresses' help in recapturing her. Demon decided that she could do with a little help herself. She called to the others with her mind. Lilith and Ilas responded immediately but Angel didn't. [She must be really focused on something if she can't hear me calling her,] thought Demon.

Demon explained the situation and asked Ilas if she would join the search. [*Lilith, darling, I'm not sure there's a lot you can do to help, unless perhaps you've had a sight?*]

[*Sorry, Demon, nothing.*]

[*Then stay with your pets and keep blocking the sender. Ilas will help me.*]

A few moments later, Ilas joined them, bringing her pet with her. Demon regarded him impassively while she spoke to Ilas with her mind

[*Is this wise Ilas? He's one of them, after all.*] Demon was concerned that Ilas was so trusting of this man, but then remembered how she'd so nearly given Gideon everything he'd asked for. She could hardly criticize, and Ilas looked happier than Demon had ever seen her before.

Ilas spoke aloud so that her pet could hear her. "It's all right, honestly, Demon; he can help. He knows who and what we are and he wants to help us. He can make sure the woman doesn't hurt anyone."

Demon was sceptical, but reluctantly agreed. She spoke aloud for the benefit of the Guard Captain and Max.

"Bring four guards and follow me. Ilas, why don't you stay in your current shape until we see where she's hidden, then you can decide what your best approach is." She closed her eyes and concentrated. "Up. She's in the upper floors, let's go."

Max had been growing concerned when Ilas had received Demon's call. Where the hell were Gideon and the rescue party? Much as he'd enjoyed the last couple of days (and he'd enjoyed them more

than any others in his life), he was beginning to worry about his fellow crewmembers, which wasn't like him at all! Where had this sudden concern for others come from? Max had spent years looking out for himself; it would be disturbing to find that he had started to care about others again. (Well, anyone other than Mr. Kitty, of course he cared about *him*.)

Ilas' face had suddenly lit up, and she said "Demon!" aloud. She'd told him all about her sister and Max was looking forward to meeting this formidable lady. The way Ilas had described her she sounded like a cross between big sister, den mother and queen bee. Could be interesting. He'd asked Ilas to change into each of her sisters in turn so he could see what they looked like. Of course he'd seen the redhead already, but the other two were new to him. If Ilas had them right they were quite a pair.

Angel, slim, black-haired, blue-eyed and tempestuous. He decided she could be quite a handful and Ilas had confirmed Angel's wild streak. He'd grinned when she'd told him that Angel had collared Gideon and taken him off to play. He wondered how much the Captain would enjoy being a plaything. Not much, knowing Gideon.

Demon, tall, cool, and blonde, always in black, looked like she was carved from ice. When Ilas told him that she'd rescued Gideon from Angel he'd laughed aloud. He tried to imagine Gideon thawing the ice queen and failed. He'd been stunned when the first wave of arousal swept through the castle and Ilas explained what it meant. His opinion of Gideon went up several notches, and continued to rise as further waves repeated through the night and next day. Well, the man was full of surprises!

So when Ilas' face had lit up and she said, "Demon!" Max was ready for anything. Was the queen bee coming to visit? Having finished Gideon off was she coming to look for a new victim? Then Ilas had explained about Dureena's escape and asked Max to help her.

"We don't want to hurt her. Maybe you could explain that to her so she'll believe it. We just need her to stay quiet for a bit longer while we work out what to do about you."

Max agreed to help, although he was sceptical about whether Dureena would ever listen to him. He was fond of the little Zanderi and found her extremely attractive, but since teaching her to dance, his contact with her had been limited.

His first view of Demon was from the rear as they entered the guardroom. And he found that view spectacular. But when she turned and stared at him with that completely frozen mask of a face, he felt chilled to the core. [Gideon must be suffering from frostbite by now.] He'd hoped that Demon would have brought the Captain with her, but no such luck.

Demon gave her orders and they started the search. She led the way gradually upward through the castle, passing through many rooms and corridors where tapestries and pictures hung, which Max longed to study. But she never paused or hesitated. Ilas had explained that Demon could detect Dureena's emotions and would use them to track her down. [Well, it's better than bloodhounds, and no one could call Demon a dog,] he thought. Max followed where Demon and Ilas led him.

Dureena had heard them beneath her and continued to make her way through the castle, working her way upwards. Every time she tried to back track and work her way down again, they seemed to be between her and the lower floors. She knew she should try to find a way down and out, but she felt trapped. Her increasing sense of isolation and panic kept her running without much thought or planning as to her direction.

Finally she found herself in the attics of the castle with nowhere left to go. She climbed up into the bare rafters and waited.

Demon entered the attic with Max and Ilas at her side, the guards following close behind. This was taking too long. Over an hour had gone by since she'd left Gideon and she was beginning to have second thoughts about what she'd done to him. She pushed those thoughts from her mind and concentrated on Dureena's feelings. They'd become increasingly intense as the search had continued and Demon was worried about the level of panic now apparent to her. She didn't want to hurt this woman if she could avoid it. She couldn't face the thought of telling Gideon that she'd hurt one of his crew.

"She's still above us." Demon led them forward, when a body came flying from the rafters and knocked Ilas to the ground. Dureena wrapped herself around the small blue haired girl and tried to get a strangle hold on her neck but Ilas started to change into another form to fend off Dureena's attack. Suddenly Ilas let out a shriek of pain and fear and collapsed to the floor, her weight dragging her from Dureena's hands.

Max leapt forward to go to Ilas, but Demon pushed him away. She rushed to kneel at the little girl's side. By now the guards had Dureena held tightly. Max couldn't believe the expression of concern and love that now showed on Demon's face. So she did have feelings!

"Ilas? Ilas are you alright?" Demon could see the girl's outer form was wavering and flexing. Ilas moaned in pain and Demon turned, still on her knees, and growled at Dureena.

"If you've done her any permanent damage, I'll kill you myself. Slowly." All expression had drained from her face again and the coldness of her statement was terrifying. Max moved to put himself between Demon and Dureena. He didn't know if he could protect Dureena from Demon's wrath; hell, if she'd really hurt Ilas he didn't know whether he wanted to. But he had to try to stop this situation from exploding into more violence.

"Calm down Demon, you're not helping Ilas by getting angry," he said. Demon glared at him with a force that made him step backwards. He could feel Dureena's breath on his neck, he was so close to her.

Ilas moaned again. Her form was still fluctuating through a variety of shapes and colors. "Ilas? Come back to us, darling." Demon decided that Max was right. Calm was needed more than anything now. She drew herself up, sitting back on her heels and breathed deeply. Slowly her body and mind calmed and she projected that calm outward. Ilas' pulsing began to slow as the waves of tranquility washed over them all. Max relaxed his stance in front of Dureena and took a step

forward.

"Is she alright?" Demon could feel his genuine concern and fondness for her little sister and relaxed a bit more. Slowly, Ilas settled into a single form, her real one. Demon reached forward and gently stroked the scar on her cheek.

"It's all right, darling, everything is all right. You're safe now." Her low voice was warm and reassuring and Ilas' eyes flickered and opened.

"What happened to me, Demon? Why did it hurt so much?" Max couldn't hold himself back; he rushed forward, and pushing Demon aside picked Ilas up and held her tightly. "Max?" Her voice was weak and her eyes still couldn't quite focus. "Oh Max, just hold me for a while."

Demon could feel that Ilas wanted Max more than her right now, and rose to her feet. She had herself under control again but was still seething at Dureena for the pain she had caused.

"Take her back to the cells. This time strip her and shackle her. We won't take any more chances." She hated the waves of fear, anger and panic that were now emanating from Dureena, but felt she had no choice. She had to protect her sisters.

"Demon, no." Ilas' voice came weakly but clearly. Demon tried to focus her thoughts to speak to Ilas' mind directly, but Ilas' thoughts were still incoherent. "She didn't mean to hurt me and she's very afraid. Don't hurt her. She mustn't be alone any more."

Demon turned and knelt by Max and Ilas. "How do you know that?"

"She was touching me when I started to change. I've never changed before while someone was touching me. I could read her mind!" Ilas sounded amazed at what had happened, but Demon could see that she was slowly regaining her strength. Max continued to hold her tightly to him, gently stroking her hair.

"What do you want me to do, Ilas?" Demon asked.

"Bring her to my rooms. Max and I will take care of her. It's all right, Demon, honestly, we'll take care of her." Ilas tried to pull herself upright but fell back into Max's arms.

Max stood, cradling Ilas gently in his arms. "I'll carry her," he said and left the attic heading back toward Ilas' rooms. Demon followed with the guards, still holding Dureena, whose panic was beginning to subside. They arrived at Ilas' rooms and Demon made her decision. She turned to Max.

"I'm holding you responsible. If anything happens to my sister, you'll pay the price, understand?" Max stepped backwards from the force of Demon's vehemence and Ilas managed a giggle as she lay in his arms.

"It's all right, Demon, don't worry. I'll be better soon. Just leave us alone for a while."

Demon signaled two of the guards to release Dureena and take position either side of Ilas' door.

She turned back to Max.

"They'll stay here, so don't try to leave without Ilas." Max carried Ilas through the doorway closely followed by Dureena.

Demon turned away from the door heading back to the courtyard. [Where the hell is Angel?]

Dureena sat on the floor by the fire as Max settled Ilas into her bed, sitting on the edge next to her, gently stroking her hair. Dureena could hear Max whispering but couldn't make out what he was saying. She sat with her arms held tightly round her knees, every sense alert for attack. She felt completely strung out by the events of the last two days. The solitary confinement and sexual arousal had left her in a state of tension and anxiety like nothing she'd ever felt before.

She heard Max moving away from the bed, and looked up at him as he came to sit in front of the fire next to her. She watched as he lowered himself carefully to the floor, sitting with his legs straight out and crossed at the ankles, his weight leaning on his arms stretched back behind him. He spoke softly. "She's asleep now. She'll probably stay that way for a while." He turned his head to look closely at Dureena as she sat shivering in the firelight. "Are you all right? You look upset."

Dureena rounded on him and had opened her mouth to scream at him, when she remembered the sleeping woman in the bed. Instead she hissed. "Upset? Yes, I'm *upset*. I've been locked away in solitary confinement for the last two days, not having a clue what was going on, where any of you were, or what was going to happen to us. What the hell is going on here, Max? Who are these people? And what do they want from us? One thing's for sure, Gideon called this one wrong when he thought they were Technomages, but what the hell are they?"

She watched as Max took a deep breath and leaned forward, putting his elbows on his knees and smiling. "It's a long story, Dureena. Are you sitting comfortably? Well, I'll begin."

Max watched Dureena closely as he spent the next hour telling her everything that Ilas had told him, about who the women were, how they'd got there, and where their crewmates were being kept. He hoped by talking soothingly and continuously, he could give Dureena the time she needed to pull herself together and calm down. He'd never seen her so out of control. This wasn't her normal raging temper; that was focused to a fine point that she used like a rapier to defend herself and attack others. This was panic, something he'd never seen in Dureena before. It worried him and puzzled him as to the cause.

When he'd finished his story and she'd asked every question she could think of, she seemed to have calmed significantly, much to his relief. He was just thinking about whether he could find them both something to eat when he was hit by another wave of arousal. He groaned aloud. "Oh shit, I wish Gideon would leave that woman alone!" He really didn't *need* another erection at this point. He turned to Dureena and was horrified to see her curled up on the floor, whimpering in pain.

"Dureena? What's the matter?" He leant over and stroked her back gently; trying to sooth the pain she appeared to feel. "It'll be over soon, don't worry." Gradually the waves diminished. He watched as Dureena uncurled herself and looked up at him, her eyes full of fear.

"What was that, Max? It's been happening all through the last couple of days. It's driving me crazy. This can't be happening to me. Not any more. Not now I'm the last..." Her voice trailed off and Max was appalled to see tears on her face. He'd only seen her cry once before.

He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly while he explained. "It's Demon. You know, the big blond who threatened to kill us if we hurt her sister? And she could probably do it without raising a sweat. She's an empath. That's how she tracked you, by your emotions. She projects as well as receives, and what she seems to be particularly good at projecting is... Well, Gideon must be making up for lost time the number of times he's made her come over the last couple of days."

He felt Dureena relax and chuckle into his chest as he held her. "Captain's doing that?"

Max smiled down at her. "Surprising isn't it? I never thought he had it in him. Now I know it can be uncomfortable when it hits, but why did it hurt you like that Dureena? Is sex that awful for you?" He tried to make light of it, but was shocked to see her face breaking up again.

She buried her face back into his chest and muttered. "Sex isn't awful. It's just not possible any more, and to keep getting aroused like that when I know that I can never do that again..." Max found himself in a state that was rare for him, speechless. [What the hell does she mean, 'never'? Half the men on the Excalibur would give their right testicle for a night with her!] He pondered how to ask her what she meant, tactfully. [To hell with tact.]

"What are you talking about Dureena? Never? If you were interested you could have more willing partners than you could possibly know what to do with. And I'd be at the front of the queue, elbowing Trace Millar in the face!"

Dureena looked up at him and smiled. "Thanks Max, but you're not... equipped for the job." The look on his face was enough to make her hurry on. "And neither is Trace or any other human male. I need my own species, and I need two of them, to... well, to make it possible." Max was startled. His knowledge of Zanderi sexuality was limited. He was aware that there were three sexes, but didn't know how they... collaborated. He watched her carefully as she went on. "I'm female..." Max grinned. [Never would have guessed.] "I need a neuter and a male to... well, to enjoy a normal sex life. But there are none left. Since the last of the colony on Theta 49 died, I'm alone. There are no more of my species alive and I'll never be able..."

Max hugged her harder. It was the death of the last Zanderi on Theta 49 that had led to Sarah Chamber's breakdown a few weeks earlier. She'd blamed herself for letting Dureena down and failing to save the last of her race.

Dureena continued. "The Zanderi neuter is quite like a human male, but Zanderi men are different. I need both to achieve... well, you know, what Demon did a while back."

Max stoked her hair gently. "I'm sorry Dureena, I had no idea. I just wish there were something that I could do."

"There is." Max looked up, startled by the deep voice coming from above and behind him. He turned his head and saw a mature Zanderi man standing looking at them both. He'd studied pictures of the Zanderi after the incident on Theta 49 and recognized the form immediately. He looked down to Dureena who had struggled out of his arms and was staring up at the Zanderi man, her mouth open and her eyes wide.

She stuttered. "Who are you? How...?" Max watched as the man knelt swiftly in front of Dureena, taking her hands into his and kissing them gently.

His deep voice spoke to her softly. "Let us help you, Dureena. Let me and Max help you."

Max found his voice at last. "Ilas? Is that you?"

The man turned to Max and gave him the same wicked grin he'd seen on Ilas' face a dozen times in the last couple of days. "Of course it is Max. Who else did you think it would be? Now let's get busy and help Dureena." Max would never have believed that anyone with as deep a voice as the Zanderi could giggle, but somehow he did.

The three of them were lying naked in front of the fire when the next of Demon's sendings swept over them. Dureena watched as Max came erect in front of her eyes and smiled. She sat up and straddled his hips, feeling Ilas move in behind her as she did so.

"Waste not, want not, Max. Let's get busy."

Max groaned as she lowered herself onto him. [Trace is never going to believe a word of this.]

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The Witches of Eriadne: Double, Double

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