

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four B - Part 1: Keeping up with the Joneses

by [The Space Witches](#)



A moment of transition.

Chapter 2

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - lunchtime

John stepped off the bullet car, and walked the short distance to his quarters. He was looking forward to hearing Lily talk about her knife throwing practice with her sisters and G'Tan. [Though Luke and I might go back to work hungry, since we might not have time to eat anything--at least nothing that's generally considered food.] He lowered his head and tried to suppress a lascivious grin, as he thought about the effect knives--and talking about them--had on Lily. Not that he had any reason to complain.

Distracted by these pleasant thoughts, John almost bumped into Mr. Jones--the one who'd accompanied them to the Well of Forever--just in front of the doors to his old quarters. John's shields went up instinctively, before he realized he didn't need them, and he quickly stepped away from the telepathic watchdog, who was glowering at him. "Excuse me, Mr. Jones."

He was walking around Jones when he heard the watchdog say, "You know that we'll get you, don't you? Sooner or later we will." John shouldn't have been surprised at the venom in the other man's voice, but he was. [Must have had a bad morning.]

John stopped and turned his head to look straight into Jones' cold, blue eyes. Keeping his voice even, he

said softly, "I thought 'innocent until proven guilty' was the case even for telepaths." After a brief pause, he added, "Oh, excuse me. For a moment, I forgot that you have to hold me to a higher standard." He stepped past Jones, and the door to his old quarters opened, but he turned to look back at the telepath watchdog before entering. "It seems that this telepathic block is also clouding your judgment. A few hours in Babylon 5's holo-brothel might help you clear your mind."

Reginald Jones was seething. How dare this arrogant P6 talk to him like that? He entered Matheson's quarters quickly, before the doors closed, going nose to nose with the young Asian, when he turned around in the middle of the room.

"Your new status as a celebrity seems to have clouded *your* judgment! Do you really think that just because you were among the crew who found the cure to the Drakh plague, you're invincible? Well, I've got news for you. Neither your status as 'Teep Hero' nor your Captain will be able to protect you forever, *Lieutenant*. We'll find out what the two of you have done, and then you'll both have to pay! And I swear, the consequences will be dire!"

Suddenly, Jones heard a strange sound, a mix between a hiss and a growl. When he looked to his left, he found that Lilith Morgaine had appeared out of nowhere, and she surged forward so quickly, and with such ferocity, that Reginald couldn't help but draw back. All too soon his back hit the wall, and the tiny redhead only stopped when she was well within his personal space. Despite the fact that she had to lean her head back to look up at him, there wasn't any doubt about who was in control.

Usually, Jones would have enjoyed the view of her generous cleavage, which he couldn't help but notice when looking down at her, but right now Lilith Morgaine reminded him of a she-wolf protecting her puppies. That impression was reinforced by the fact that she was actually baring her teeth as she hissed, "If you dare to do anything to John, his career, his reputation, his family or friends, I swear to the Goddess from that moment, you'll live a life of fear."

Even without being able to read her, Reginald knew that the tiny redhead meant every single word. Having witnessed her practice with her dagger, he'd got a hint of what she was capable of, and he feared that if provoked enough, she *would* be capable of anything. And there was no doubt that Lilith Morgaine was furious.

"Calm down, Lily."



Reginald looked up, surprised to see Matheson standing behind his partner and placing his hands on her shoulders. For a few seconds, he had completely forgotten the young Lieutenant was still there. He distantly realized that his body was covered with cold sweat. The inability to sense anyone or anything was really starting to get at him.

"He doesn't deserve your anger." Matheson pulled his partner back, hugging her against his chest gently--a simple gesture that expressed a world of emotions. The tiny redhead was still glaring at Reginald, though there was less fire in her eyes than there had been only a few seconds earlier.

In contrast, Lieutenant Matheson's voice and eyes expressed a calmness that surprised Reginald. [Is he

planning some mind game? If so, he'll be disappointed.]

"What Mr. Jones deserves is our pity. Because he's envious."

Before he could retort with a derisive, "Oh, please!" Matheson continued in the same calm, almost pensive voice, looking straight into his eyes.

"You're envious because I'm the living proof that telepaths and 'mundanes' can live and work together. You're jealous of me, Mr. Jones, because I have friends and a family who are there for me, who stand up for me, in good times or bad. You have no one. Like all the other Joneses I have met, you have isolated yourself from everyone, sacrificing friendship, love, all that defines us as human beings. And you did it for the sake of your career, not for the sake of other telepaths, as you claim. You sneer at my relationships with 'normals' because it makes you feel superior, and you need that to compensate for the emptiness in your life. I can't feel anything but pity for someone who leads such a meaningless life."

For a while, Reginald could only stare at Matheson, but finally he found his voice again. He was barely able to keep it under control when he hissed, "Your emotional attachment to your family and friends is your weakness, Lieutenant, whether you want to accept it or not. You'll only bring them down with you; and I can assure you that you WILL go down. You will go down in flames!" With that, he whirled around and left Matheson's quarters, distantly wondering why the Lieutenant's ridiculous speech had rattled him so much.

John turned Lily around, holding her softly by the shoulders as he smiled at her. "Did anyone ever tell you that you're damned frightening when you're angry?"

Lily grinned. "Snoopy definitely thinks *you're* damned frightening when you're calm."

"Snoopy?" John raised his eyebrows, giving her an amused look. "He doesn't look like a beagle."

"Well, he was snooping around in your head." Lily's grin turned into a sheepish smile. "I'm sorry I interfered, but when I heard him threaten you..."

John chuckled, as he hugged Lily against his chest, then pushed her back to cup her face in his hands. "Other men might not like it if their partners take a stand for them, but not me. I don't know what I'd do without your and Luke's support and strength." His voice almost cracked at his last words, and he hoped he was able to express through his kiss what he could not communicate mind to mind, due to Lily's telepathic block.

"Am I interrupting something?" An amused voice asked suddenly.

John and Lily turned to find Luke leaning against the wall, just inside the connecting door. "Quite the opposite," John replied, letting go of Lily with one arm to reach out to his partner.

Luke covered the distance between them with a few quick strides, leaning into their embrace and kisses before speaking again. "I thought I'd better come and get you before lunch is charred." Luke grinned. Of course, that wasn't possible since the oven and cooking plates had sensors to prevent that.

"You should have come earlier--you missed all the fun." John gave Luke a wide-eyed look, which

somehow didn't match the obvious mischief in his voice. "My old 'friend' Jones seems to be afraid of Lily."

Luke gave the tiny redhead an amused look. "Really? I wonder why." He leaned down to kiss her forehead. "Tell me what I missed over lunch?"

Lily nodded. "And also about the knife throwing practice." She giggled as they left for their shared quarters, arm in arm, then suddenly John saw her eyes widen for a moment. "Uh-oh, someone else is hungry too."

"Are the twins demanding lunch through the link? No wonder. They do take a bottle without whining now, but Faylinn and Dasha never drink as much as when they get their milk straight from the source." Luke gave Lily a soft, teasing smile as he added in a low voice, "Not that I can blame them..."

Lily smiled lasciviously. "Well who knows, if you two are good boys and clean your plates, you might get dessert."

"So how was your practice session with G'Tan?" Luke asked, taking Dasha from Lily's arms and cradling the half sleeping boy against his shoulder. While she had breastfed the twins, John and Luke had fed Lily lunch in between eating themselves. Now everybody was sated, and Faylinn and her brother obviously needed a siesta.

"Interesting." While they put the twins to bed, Lily told her lovers, with a gleeful smile, how much fun she and her sisters had had at the gym. John and Luke's reaction to their castrating abilities was less than enthusiastic--[And of course our little Amazon enjoys that!]- Luke thought, but they were both in stitches at her recounting of how she'd tortured Jones. Fortunately, they managed to keep the volume of their laughter down, or they would have awakened the twins.

"That explains why he has more gray hair than he had yesterday," John said with a chuckle. "If you keep this up, he'll end up completely white."

"Well, that depends entirely on him." Lily's eyes sparkled with mischief for a moment, but then she smiled lovingly at her sleeping children and bent to kiss them. John and Luke did the same before following her back into their quarters' living area. After a few steps, Lily turned around, looking up at them sincerely.

[Uh-oh, here comes trouble.] Luke thought.

"Are you in a hurry to get back to work?" When they both said no, Lily grinned. "Good." Before they were able to react, Lily had grabbed her men and pulled them into their bedroom behind her, half flinging, half pushing, first John, then Luke onto the bed, and pouncing on them only a moment later. Straddling them on all fours, she gave them a naughty grin, eyes dark with desire and nipples standing out clearly against the green fabric of her dress. "Because I want my dessert *now*." Without further preamble, Lily started caressing their crotches, and Luke immediately felt his cock spring to life under her hand. He closed his eyes, letting his head roll back. [God, I don't know how she does it, but one touch and I'm lost.] He heard his own moan of protest echoed by John, when Lily suddenly withdrew her hands, but when her dagger appeared in her hand, they were immediately silenced.

Lily sat back on her haunches beside Luke, waving the knife around, above, and in front of them, as

she gave them a wicked grin. "Well now, would you prefer me to cut you out of your clothes, or will you take them off yourselves?"

They stripped hurriedly, especially John. Supplies had already started querying how he managed to lose so many of his EF T-shirts, and he clearly wanted to avoid having to get another one.

Luke was acutely aware of Lily watching them hungrily, and that turned him on even more. "Stop. These are for me," Lily commanded when they went to take off their briefs. "Lie back and enjoy."

Luke could feel a jolt of electricity pass through his body at Lily's promising smile, making his cock twitch. He hardly dared breathe when she leaned forward and brought her dagger up to his throat, tracing its tip down and across his chest in languid waves, then further down, all the while softly squeezing his balls with her other hand.

"Looks like someone wants out," Lily murmured as the tip of her dagger reached the top of his briefs. Luke held his breath, once again finding that the knowledge of what would come now didn't diminish his excitement in the least. Lily traced the dagger down the length of his hard shaft, then with two smooth cuts freed it from its confinement.

"Lose that," she ordered him roughly, while scrambling across the bed to kneel at John's side, who'd been watching, motionless. "Oh look, that poor, poor thing wants out too." Lily purred, then gave him the same treatment as Luke before cutting off his briefs. An excited smile played around her lips when she sat back between them, taking in their completely naked bodies while playing with her dagger.

[What is she planning now?] Luke thought, not sure if he should be more worried or excited.

"I want to watch you."

Lily's voice was a mere whisper, but it still sent shivers of excitement through John's body. Turning his head to look into Luke's eyes, he saw that excitement mirrored there. He rolled onto his side as his older lover did the same, and their lips met in a deep, passionate kiss. John wasn't able to *feel* Luke, as he usually could, and for a moment, he remembered the first visit to Eriadne, when Lily's block had also prevented him sensing anything telepathically. But that surely hadn't prevented him from enjoying himself then, and it wouldn't now.

Concentrating on the here and now again, John reached down and enclosed Luke's erect cock in his hand, starting to stroke it, feeling his partner's hand cover his own hard shaft. His tongue found Luke's, entwining it in a slow, sensuous dance.

John felt the mattress shift, and a few moments later Lily's long hair tickled his skin, before her lips touched his ass, wandering towards his hips, her hair trailing behind as they left his skin to move in Luke's direction. John could feel Lily's naked skin on his, as she slowly moved around to kiss, lick and caress their bodies while Luke and he continued to pleasure each other.

Suddenly, Luke pushed him onto his back and moved away, and the hand on his cock was replaced by a mouth. Lily's mouth, as John found when he opened his eyes. She grabbed his hips, pulling while she slid off the bed backwards, until he was sitting in front of her and she was on all fours, licking up the length of his shaft, then slowly lowering her mouth on it, tongue whirling. He moaned and grabbed Lily's hair, watching Luke starting to fuck her.

Lily was dripping wet, and in the state she was in now, she wanted it anyway but nice and slow. She loved being taken from behind, and it seemed Luke had every intention of showing her why. Holding onto her hips, he pulled them back every time he thrust into her, hard and fast, brushing against that most sensitive spot inside her vagina. Lily could feel how the vibrations of her moans around his cock were driving John wild, and she knew he wouldn't be able to hold on much longer. Suddenly, she felt his hand grab her hair even tighter, and she steadied herself against his hips as he came hard in her mouth, uttering a guttural cry. That was enough to push her over the edge into an intense orgasm, running through her whole body in seemingly endless waves, taking Luke with her.

Lily smiled to herself as she put on her dress. Sex with her men might not be the same when they weren't able to share minds, but even so, it went much deeper than the physical level. Watching John and Luke getting dressed, she felt her heart overflow with love. [I swear to the Goddess, I won't let anyone or anything divide this family. Not now, not ever.] Picking John's uniform jacket up off the floor, Lily felt a momentary disorientation. It was as if her body was on autopilot, helping John put it on, while something else had taken command of her mind. "John? Could you try to send to me while you're at work? Just randomly. Whenever you have time." She blinked. [Where did that question come from?]

John turned, giving her a puzzled look. "Why?"

[That's a good question, but I'm sure it will be answered.] "I just want to test a theory I have."

"And what theory is that?" Luke asked, head cocked to the side as he was studying her.

Lily frowned, trying to put into words what was forming at the back of her mind, but it wasn't the right time. "I'll tell you tonight, once I know more."

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - early afternoon

Alden Catches sat at the tiny table in his tiny quarters on the very large ship, Excalibur, studying the data which was relayed in a constant stream from the Telepathic Activity Detectors--TADs for short--to his datapad. His team members were spread throughout the Excalibur, trying to detect any telepathic activity.

So far, this approach had been a dead end. As Alden had reported to Ines León, whatever caused the block, it didn't just block telepathic reception. It completely prevented any telepathic activity, as he and his team had found out when they had tried to detect each other's attempts at both sending and reading, in tests Alden had them carry out at random. That basically ruled out telepaths as the source of this block. Had such people been present, the TADs would have detected their use of telepathy to block the investigation team.

But there were certain other things Alden had noticed, which he wasn't ready to disclose to anyone--at least not before thinking them through very carefully. And then he'd still have to decide who to reveal

them to.

He leaned back in his chair, folding his arms, as his eyes continued to study the data constantly coming in from his team members. The display didn't show the impulses typically created by the use of telepathy, but the data stream was the tiniest bit off the neutral value. That in itself wouldn't have been unusual, and most people would have attributed this deviation to some kind of interference from the ship's instruments, Epsilon 3, or maybe even its sun. But Alden didn't.

For one, if the deviation had come from a natural source, it would have fluctuated, even if only ever so slightly. Instead, it was constant and regular. If on the other hand, the source had been among the Excalibur's normal instruments and equipment, the blocking field couldn't have expanded and contracted as often and erratically as it did. His team members had told him that when they'd come over from the space station that morning, the blocking field had almost reached Babylon 5. Now the field only just surrounded the Excalibur. But ship activities didn't run erratically, there was a cycle to automated functions, and Alden had checked those cycles. Neither the automatic ship's functions nor those triggered manually, could have created a telepathic block.

The investigators who traveled back and forth between the Excalibur and Babylon 5 weren't blocked all the time. This clearly indicated that the block couldn't have been caused by a virus of some kind, but of course they had to check all possibilities thoroughly.

As far as Alden could determine, the only possibility left seemed to be that someone on the Excalibur had found a device that somehow blocked telepaths. So far, Reginald's teams hadn't been able to find anything unusual in the ship's bowels, and Alden doubted they would.

He had seen a similar effect once before. The devices used then had been different--much less sophisticated, and intended for less peaceful means. Ines hadn't known of his previous experiences when she had given him this particular job, of course--Alden had made sure no one found out about what he'd witnessed back then, or he would have been long dead by now. He frowned as a shadow of the pain he'd felt threatened to creep into his mind again. Shaking off those memories, Alden leaned forward to concentrate on the present riddle. Resting his elbows on the table, clasped hands supporting his chin, he looked up at the wall. [Very similar. Too similar to be a coincidence.] His eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly. [A ship made of Human, Minbari, and *Vorlon* technology. Living technology, able to develop and mutate...]

Yes, he'd have to think this through *very* carefully.

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - late afternoon

Luke Raven felt like he'd had a two-hour wrestling match with a Narn, when he left the bedroom-come-interrogation-chamber in Ms. Jones's quarters. He'd been prepared for an unpleasant experience, but that hadn't made it any easier. Ms. Jones had tried everything from charming him to threatening him, but Luke had managed to maneuver around her trick questions, without giving anything away. He hoped. Her parting remark about the valuable information Luke had given her must have been meant only to rattle him, to provoke him into making an error. He had only nodded

and replied, "I'm glad to be of help."

Luke stopped dead in his tracks when he saw who was waiting in the living room/kitchenette area, where Ms. Jones' receptionist sat.

"Short-term change in the schedule," John said, his voice and face deceptively calm, but his eyes let Luke see how nervous he was.



Luke made an effort to smile softly. "It's not as bad as you think." [No, it's much worse.] He didn't need to speak the words, as he could see from the concern in John's eyes that he must look as horrible as he felt. He wanted to say more, but the receptionist's presence prevented that. "Now go, you don't want to keep Ms. Jones waiting. I'll see you later." Luke squeezed John's shoulder gently as they passed, nodding as their eyes met, in an attempt at encouraging his partner.

John gave him a hesitant smile, then took a deep breath and entered the lion's den.

Luke slumped onto the seat in the empty bullet car, running his hands through his hair as he leaned forward. He had to support his head, as it felt as if it would fall off if he didn't. He'd only stopped at the nearest comm. station to Ms. Jones's quarters to tell his assistant in Medbay that he'd be taking the rest of the afternoon off. Luke had told her that he'd be in his quarters in case of an emergency, then he'd almost run for the next bullet car stop.

All he wanted to do now was to go home, and hold Lily and the twins in his arms, to let their warmth and love drain away the cold, dread and anxiety that filled him. He wished he could shut his brain off, as it kept rerunning the interview in his head, pointing out things he'd said which might have given Boss Bitch a clue as to what was going on. [Stop it! This doesn't help. If I gave anything away, it's no use whining about it. We can only try to stop the damage getting worse.] He took a shuddering breath. [I just hope John will be all right!]

When Luke entered his quarters, he found Faylinn and Dasha crawling toward him at top speed, gurgling as they tried to escape from Lily who was crawling after them. "I'll get you two, and then I'll tickle you until you're too exhausted to run off."

Luke was afraid he'd collide with Dasha when suddenly, the twins and their mother all stopped in their tracks, and three pairs of eyes--one dark brown, one green-brown, and one emerald green--looked up at Luke.

"Sad Eyes!" Lily's eyes widened, and she scrambled to her feet, hurrying toward him and pulling Luke into her arms. He buried his head in her red curls and closed his eyes, holding her tightly as he inhaled her scent, shutting out everything else but the feeling of his lover holding him silently.

Suddenly, he felt a tug at the left leg of his pants, and he looked down to see Dasha pulling himself up onto his feet, looking up at his Dad. Faylinn was standing behind her brother, holding on to Lily's skirt. At nine months, they were already quite secure on their feet, though they still needed something to hold onto when they walked. As they had learned everything so quickly so far, Luke was sure that by their first birthday, they'd be walking alone.

"Hey, you two troublemakers." Luke let go of Lily, to squat down before the twins, who walked into his outstretched arms, holding onto him. He cuddled them, feeling Lily's arms come around them all and her forehead lean against his. Miraculously, even Faylinn remained silent as they remained in this embrace for several seconds, as if she'd felt her father's need for comfort. Finally, Luke took a deep breath, and Lily sat back on her heels, watching him silently when he got up and carried the twins to the thin mattress that lay in the middle of the living room.

Lily watched in silence, as Luke laid the twins on the near end of the mattress, then rolled them across to the other end, which caused them to giggle. Smiling, she shuffled over to kneel in front of the mattress, watching as Luke bowed over his son and daughter and started tickling them. A strand of Luke's dark blond hair fell over his face, and Lily had to resist the urge to cross the distance between them, and run her fingers through that soft hair. It was often ruffled, almost unruly sometimes, but Lily loved it that way. And she loved his letting it grow. "Did I tell you how much I love your longer hair?" Lily asked softly.

Luke looked at her through the errant strand of hair. "Not today." He smiled back, but it was a sad, hesitant smile, and Lily felt her own smile falter.

"How was it?" Lily had tried to be patient, to let Luke settle down and collect his wits before he told her, but she just couldn't hold back any longer.

Luke's head dropped for a moment, and she could see his lips press together, before he lifted his head again to look at her, heaving a sigh. "Horrible. But I hope... I think I did OK." He smiled weakly at Lily. "I even managed not to lie." His smile turning into a grin, as he added, "At least not outright. When Boss Bitch asked me directly if I knew who was responsible for the telepathic block or what caused it, I answered, 'No.' After all, I don't *know* the Vorlons who brought that ability out in you--or any Vorlons, for that matter--and I certainly don't know how your blocking ability works."

Lily gave him a gentle smile, shaking her head. "Twisting the truth, Doctor? And I thought the Captain's influence on you wouldn't be that strong, since you're not around him as much as John..." she trailed off when she saw Luke frown.

"He's... John's being interrogated now."

"I know," Lily admitted softly, "Lt. Jackson called to tell me. John didn't have time to call himself, since he was asked to go *immediately* and had to inform Matthew." She sighed, frowning.

"I'm sure she did that on purpose. Boss Bitch must have thought it would make John nervous enough to blunder, say something that would help her find the answer..." Luke ground to a halt, and for a long while, he and Lily looked at each other in concern, the room silent except for the twin's soft babbling.

They were startled out of their silent brooding when Faylinn started whimpering--no doubt protesting the sudden lack of entertainment and the gloomy atmosphere in the room.

"You're right, my darling." Lily lay down on her belly on the mattress and started to tickle the twin's feet, which obtained their approving laughter. "We shouldn't dwell on our doubts. If we want any prophecy to fulfill itself, then we want it to be a good one." She smiled up at Luke. "So we'd better banish our fears and doubts, and only think of our love and hope for John."

Luke took a deep breath, then nodded. "It certainly can't hurt. I'm sure John can use any kind of support right now, so let's give it to him."

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - at the same time in Ms. Jones' interrogation chamber

John sat opposite Ms. Jones, silently going through a relaxation techniques he'd learned back in his Psi Corps days. When he'd entered the room, she'd ignored his greeting, barked "Sit down!" at him without looking up, and continued to study something on her datapad, occasionally making an entry. John had looked at the only empty chair in the room, which stood in the niche created by the table Jones sat at, and two walls. [Literally cornering me,] John had thought as he'd sat down.

While Jones had still been sitting around the corner of the small table, he'd had no doubt that she'd move her chair in front of him for the 'interview', to confront him directly. John had basic training in interrogation techniques, but he was sure that Boss Bitch had enjoyed a much more thorough education in that area. He'd have to be careful, and completely truthful. Even if the Joneses couldn't telepathically scan him, there were instruments they could use to detect the minute changes in body temperature and skin color, which would pick up on a lie. Just because John couldn't see such an instrument, didn't mean it wasn't there.

So John had sat there and waited, while Ms. Jones kept 'busy' with her datapad. John knew that it was just another trick to keep him off balance. [And that's also why she suddenly shuffled the schedule around.]

It should have been G'Tan's turn to be interviewed, while John had been scheduled for the following morning, but Ms. Jones' assistant had informed him that they'd been switched around, just five minutes before the interview was due to start. John was determined not to let her manipulations get to him. Too much depended on him getting through this 'interview' without making an error. [And too many people. I can't fail them. I won't!]

Finally, Ms. Jones leaned back and looked at him. "Lieutenant Matheson, I assume you've made yourself familiar with the formalities of this interview."

"Yes, Ma'am." John answered calmly, nodding.

"I had a very *interesting* conversation with Dr. Raven, so I hope the same will be the case with ours." As John had expected, she moved her chair in front of his, until they sat almost knee to knee.

[Such cheap tricks, Boss Bitch? I hope you'll stick to them.] John doubted she would, but he allowed himself a smile as he replied, "I've never had a boring conversation with Luke since I've known him, so I'll do my best to keep the standard up."

Ms. Jones lifted an eyebrow in amusement, as she dropped a data crystal into the reader/recorder on her desk. "Well then, let's start the interview. State your name, rank, the works."

Matheson had barely finished his sermon when Ines León dove right in. "How long have you had this device that blocks telepaths?" She had decided to use an accusatory, aggressive tone from the beginning. That alone often caused the person being interrogated to start rambling in defense of themselves, until they let something slip. Ines knew that in his Psi Corps days Matheson had learned a few basic interrogation techniques, but that had been many years ago, and he'd never expanded on it according to his file.

"Neither I nor Captain Gideon, nor anyone else on this crew has such a device, to the best of my knowledge. I've never even heard or read of such devices, except in Science Fiction," John Matheson replied calmly.

"Did you find this device on one of the planets you visited during your search for the cure?"

"There is no such device anywhere on the Excalibur. As far as I'm aware." John gave her a defiant glare, hoping that the last qualifier would distract his interrogator.

"So there's such a device inside the hull, the walls, and/or the floors?"

"I don't know of any device capable of blocking telepaths anywhere on, in, or around the Excalibur."

"How often have you used this device?"

"We don't have any device."

Ines kept asking similar questions, and when she felt she had succeeded in raising Matheson's irritation level to the perfect point, she suddenly leaned forward, lower arms resting on her knees, so the young Lieutenant would get a clear view of her generous cleavage. His eyes flickered just for a moment as she asked, "Did your partners object to you raping their minds during sex? Is that why you're using the blocking device?"

The question seemed to take a beat to sink in, and for a moment the anger flashed in Matheson's eyes at her suggestion, before he narrowed them and said coldly, "I would never rape my partner's minds, or anyone else's. I've never raped *anyone's* mind in my whole life. Unlike certain telepath watchdogs, I don't rip through other people's brains just because I might find information which suits my own interests."

Ines' instincts immediately pricked up their imaginative ears. "Do you mean anyone in particular with that phrase, 'certain telepath watchdogs'?"

She saw the corners of Matheson's mouth twitch slightly. [Score!]

He said defensively, "No one you need to know about."

"I'll decide that. More specifically, do you mean anyone on my team?"

"This has nothing to do with the current investigation…"

"So you *were* talking about someone on my team," Ines cut his protest short. "Considering he's the only one who's been here previously, it must be Mr. Jones with the blond hair and the beard. What happened when he was here for your inspection in July 2267? What did Captain Gideon do to Mr. Jones to make him hate coming back here so much?"

"I have no idea what, if anything, happened between Captain Gideon and this particular Mr. Jones. The Captain didn't tell me about any incident, and I didn't scan him for information." Matheson gave her a defiant glare, and Ines decided to leave it--for the moment. She'd had her suspicions about Reggie's first visit to the Excalibur confirmed, and returned to the previous topic, which was the key to Matheson's weakness: his family.

"Your partners must be into S&M, if they enjoy having their minds dominated by you during sex."

John was surprised at how much that kind of accusation rattled him. [Because it is totally unfounded, and she knows it!] He replied softly, "Lily, Luke and I *share* our minds, on a consensual basis, as we share everything else in our family."

"How sweet," Boss Bitch quipped, as she leaned back in her chair. It made John wish he could wipe that sarcastic grin off her pretty face, as she settled her body into a deceptively relaxed position. She continued the interrogation immediately. "Did your Captain order you to use this device because he didn't trust you around mundanes?"

"If Captain Gideon didn't trust me, I wouldn't be on his crew. And I say it again, *there is no device!*"

"Then I'm sure you can explain to me where this telepathic block comes from."

John forced himself to stay calm. "I have no idea how it operates and have nothing to do with it!"

"I'm sure Captain Gideon will be able to explain it to me, then."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because he knows even less about it than I do."

"So you're saying that you *do* know something about the source of this telepathic block," Ms. Jones insisted.

John forced himself to stay calm. "I am merely saying that, although he may know more about telepathy than the average 'normal', Captain Gideon knows less about it than I do. Thus he'd be even less able to come up with an explanation for this phenomenon."

"Do you know anything about the source of the telepathic block, Lieutenant?" Jones leaned forward again, her dark eyes boring into his.

"I don't know any more about how this telepathic block works than you do." John could only hope that she took his answer at face value and didn't realize that he had avoided her specific question.

Jones suddenly stood, forcing John to sit back quickly, as she stepped between his knees and bent forward, leaning her hands against the wall and thus trapping his head between her arms. "You must really hate other telepaths to do this to them. Do you know how ill this makes all the telepaths on this ship feel? You're depriving them of an essential part of their minds."

John held her stare and replied through clenched teeth, "Well then, I'd have to hate myself too, or do you think that I'm any less effected by the block than any other telepath on the Excalibur?"

Boss Bitch brought her face another fraction of a centimeter nearer, her voice vicious. "If you hate being a telepath so much, why don't you just take the sleepers?"

John snorted. "My telepathy is just as much part of me as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or sensing. I have no wish to get rid of any of these senses."

Jones stood back again, turning away as if in thought. John finally had time to catch his breath somewhat. But he was wary; this might just be the calm before the storm. [I don't think I said anything...] His thoughts were interrupted when Jones turned back to face him and sat down again.

She cocked her head to the side. "When did you last fuck your Captain? Did he go top or bottom?"

John blinked at the sudden, unexpected turn the interrogation had taken. He almost couldn't believe his ears. "Beg your pardon?" he finally managed to utter.

"You understood my question very well, Lieutenant!"

John shook his head, giving Ms. Jones a disgusted look. "You are sick."

Jones shot him a cruel smile. "Answer my question!"

John snorted. "That must have been, like, *never*."

Boss Bitch looked quizzically at him. "Did he turn you down then? It's obvious that you like men, do I assume that the Captain doesn't? Or is it just *you* he finds repellant?" she added in a low voice, leaning forward again.

John opened his mouth to retort, but what emerged from his throat wasn't a smart-mouthed answer, it was laughter. Laughter bubbling up from somewhere inside him in reaction to that ridiculous question. He couldn't stop it, and it got worse when he caught a momentary look of surprise and then anger on Ms. Jones' face, before she brought herself under control again. John could do nothing but sit there, shaking his head and laughing.

Ines had expected a range of possible reactions to her provocation, but not this. Not laughter. Her surprise quickly turned into anger at herself. [Fuck! I was so close to getting him defensive *and* angry! Congratulations Ines, you blew it!] Watching Matheson as he almost shook with laughter, she knew there was little hope of salvaging the situation. She concentrated on bringing her anger and disappointment under control. [Well, this round may go to you, Lieutenant Teep Hero. But you'd better be advised that I won't make the same mistake again.]

Finally, Matheson calmed down, and leaned forward in an imitation of her earlier movements.

John leaned forward, until his face was within a few centimeters of Jones', looking straight into her

eyes. "I am sorry to have interrupted you, Ms. Jones. Please, do go on. I'm sure you have many more questions relevant to this investigation." Giving her a hint of a smile, he stood long enough to turn the chair around, so its back faced Ms. Jones, then sat down on it backwards, resting his arms on the backrest's top. John leaned his chin on his arms and gave Boss Bitch his best innocent look. "I'm all ears."

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - evening

Lily had been working half-heartedly on her latest earring creation, when the door buzzer went off. Frowning, she looked up from where she sat on the floor, in front of the small table, with her beads and accessories in easy reach. [Who could this be?]

She was alone, since Luke had gone to Medbay to deal with a surprise inspection by Frog Boy's team. The twins were in bed, almost sleeping, and John was still... Lily clamped down on the momentary anxiety which came with that thought. Laying the earring on the table as she stood, Lily called for the door to open as she walked towards it. She lifted her eyebrows in surprise when she saw Lt. Jackson standing outside the door. "Christina! Now that is a surprise!"

Jackson smiled back, although Lily had the impression she was somewhat nervous. "Hello, Lily. I was on the way to my quarters when I met Dr. Raven heading for Medbay, and he told me that Lt. Matheson is still in with Ms. Jones." Jackson gave Lily a slightly sheepish grin. "Well, I thought you might be alone and like some company?" Before Lily could answer, she added, "I know you could ask your sisters around, but…"

"And they were here earlier, but left a while before Luke went to Medbay." Lily smiled up at the taller woman and said, "I'd love you to keep me company. We haven't had much of a chance to really get to know each other yet, so we have a lot of catching up to do." With a mischievous grin, she added, "And a lot of stories to swap about John. So come on in!" She grabbed Christina's hand and turned, pulling her inside.

Christina Jackson laughed, as she followed the tiny redhead into her quarters. "Well, Lily, I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Christina Jackson was still sitting on the sofa with Lily, both women doubled over with laughter, when Luke Raven got home about an hour later.

"You two sure seem to be having fun." Luke smiled, sitting down on Lily's other side and putting his arm around her shoulders as he kissed her cheek.

"That goes without saying, when women are being rude about men," Lily said with a naughty grin.

"Uh-oh, I think I'd better go back to Medbay..." Luke started to stand again, but Lily grabbed his arm, giggling.

"No way! You're not going anywhere without me for the rest of the day!"

"Don't worry, Doc," Jackson inserted, "We were mainly comparing notes about my boss. Your turn will come next time Lily and I find time to chat." She allowed her dead-pan expression to change into a wicked grin, as Luke eyed her dubiously. He then glared at Lily, who had a matching grin on her face.

Luke sighed and assumed a mournful expression. "Poor John, having to bear one or the other of you all the time. At least I have some peace in Medbay, although Angel is sometimes just as bad as her little sister."

Lily gave him a scandalized look. "Just as bad as me? I must be going soft."

Jackson laughed, but reminded herself, [I shouldn't let myself get too familiar with my senior officer's family, as it could make things difficult.] She then sighed regretfully. "Well, it was fun, but I guess it's time for me to go home and..." she trailed off when the door slid open again, and a tired-looking John Matheson entered.

"Sweet Face!"

"John!"

"Sir!" Automatically, Christina stood, watching as Lily and Luke rushed towards their lover, drawing him into their arms. For a while, they held him silently, then took his hands into theirs and pulled him toward the sofa.

Christina was relieved to see that although he looked pretty worn out, her superior officer and mentor seemed to be all right. She'd always respected him, both as an officer and a human being. Then one day, after one of his biannual deep scans, she'd caught the pain, shame and anger in his eyes as his façade had slipped for a moment, when he'd felt unwatched. Christina had quickly hidden the horror that she'd felt inside. Until then, she hadn't really thought about the price telepaths had to pay to live a 'normal' life. [Being mind-raped every six months, just so you can work in the job you love?] Matheson had risen even more in her esteem. When he'd suddenly been called to Ms. Jones' quarters for his interview that afternoon, Christina had been worried. Even more so when she'd called Lily to tell her the news, and seen the color drain from Lily's face.

"Sir," Jackson nodded, "I'm glad to see that bitch left you in one piece."

John waved his hand dismissively, giving her a weak smile. "No need for formalities when we're off duty, Christina. And yes, I'm glad too, as for a time it didn't look that good." His lips quirked into a tiny grin. "But it seems Boss Bitch is a little overeager to solve this mystery. She tried to make me blunder, but pushed that little bit too hard."

"Yes!" Lily shouted gleefully, all but bouncing. "This calls for another celebration!" She looked up at Matheson. "You must be hungry."

He nodded. "I didn't feel it until now, but yes, I am. Ravenous, even."

"Well, then I'll leave you to your celebration and go make myself some dinner, too," Christina said with a smile.

"Why go to the trouble, when you can stay and eat with us?" John asked, smiling back at her, as he hugged Lily against his side. "Our little redhead here wanted to invite you for dinner sometime, anyway."

Jackson smiled, moved by the invitation. "Thank you, but I don't want to intrude on your family time."

"You should know John better than to think he'd invite you if he didn't mean it." Luke smiled warmly at her. "Be our guest, please."

Lily nodded eagerly, and Jackson found that she really felt like staying. "Well, in that case, thank you." She smiled warmly at the threesome, then added, "But I insist on helping with dinner preparations!"

January 15th 2070 - Day 3 of the Jones investigation - late evening

They had all ended up in kitchen, preparing dinner together, and had then settled around the table to enjoy the spaghetti with different sauces, accompanied by some red wine from their illegal supply. It had been a pleasant evening, the conversation spanning everything but the Joneses. It was already gone 23:00, when Christina Jackson left for her quarters, promising Lily with a wink that they'd continue their interesting conversation as soon as possible.

"I think I'd better not ask what that 'interesting conversation' was about," John murmured, and found his suspicions confirmed when Lily gave him a big grin and Luke cleared his throat. He sighed as they sat down on the couch, Lily and Luke on either side of him. "I don't know if it's a good or a bad thing that you two get along so well."

Lily punched his arm. "A good thing, of course. We'll always keep each other up to date on your latest moods and quirks, so we'll be able to anticipate all your wishes." She gave him a wide-eyed innocent look, then stuck her tongue out at Luke, who for some inexplicable reason got a sudden coughing fit just at that moment.

John smiled, raising an eyebrow as he gave Lily a dubious look. Then he suddenly remembered something. "By the way, you wanted to explain tonight why you asked me to try and send to you this afternoon."

Lily nodded. "First, try again, and keep it up for a while. Then we'll see if I was right."

"OK." John had no idea what she intended, but concentrated and tried to contact Lily's mind. As he'd expected, he couldn't get through, but kept trying. Her eyes narrowed...

[[Hello, Sweet-Face.]]

John drew in his breath sharply, staring at Lily. "But... How... What did you do?"

Lily half smiled, but ignored his question for the moment. "Did you sense anyone else besides me?"

John turned to look at Luke, who was watching silently, then back at Lily. "No, I didn't. I only felt the connection with your mind."

Lily's smile grew, until she was beaming. "Perfect! I managed to let you through, without

compromising the block as a whole! Now you know that if anything happens, if you need to warn us or are in trouble, you'll be able to reach me even through the block. You just need to 'call' me."

John shook his head in wide-eyed amazement, then frowned. "But won't the Joneses be able to detect if I do that?"

Lily shook her head. "No, I don't think so. Let me try and explain how the block works." She frowned, trying to phrase her explanation in a way that would make sense, then stood. Sometimes, thinking was easier when she was moving. "I don't understand it completely myself, as the Vorlons never found it necessary to explain anything to us, but let's say the telepathic block is like a three-dimensional spider's web. Depending on what telepathic wavelengths it has to cover, it looks slightly different--the distance between the 'threads' can be bigger or smaller, their structure or 'stickiness' can differ."

Lily gave John and Luke a questioning look, to see if her explanation was clear so far, and when they nodded, she continued, pacing as she spoke. "So this time the web only has to prevent a very specific wavelength coming through, thus the structure is quite simple, aimed at activities within this one wavelength only. Every time a telepath uses his ability to either sense or send, that causes the strands of the web to vibrate, and like a spider sitting in her web, I can sense that, and locate the source of the vibrations. Depending on how strong they are, I can also say how powerful the particular telepath is. And I noticed that even between telepaths of the same strength, there can be tiny differences." She stopped and looked at John. "Since we 'pathed so often, I'm intimately familiar with your mind, with how it feels when you use your telepathy. So what I did this afternoon was to try and find out if I could identify you among all the other telepaths." She smiled. "And I could."

"Why do you think the Joneses' devices can't detect it, if you let John through?" Luke asked, a concentrated look on his face.

Lily nodded and settled down on the couch again, tucking her feet underneath her. "Let's go back to the spider's web analogy for that. Remember, the web covers everything within its expansion area. When I feel John trying to 'path, I can manipulate the web very subtly to open a passage, so his telepathic impulses, and only his, can come through to me. Since the rest of the web is still intact and not being influenced by that, the other telepaths and their detectors can't perceive anything." She frowned, giving John and Luke a questioning look. "Does that make sense?"

"I think it does," Luke said, looking at John. "But you're the expert in telepathic matters."

John shook his head. "I can't see any fault in Lily's train of thought. Though I'm not privy to the latest research on telepathy, and even if I was, I doubt it would help me. They couldn't possibly have anticipated such a strong blocker as you." He smiled at Lily. "You are incredible, do you know that? This possibility never crossed my mind."

Lily gave him a tiny grin. "Well, it was one of my hunches, actually. So thank the Vorlons who brought that ability out in me. Credit where credit's due."

"I doubt I'll ever meet any of them, but I'll try to remember that, if I do." John put his arms around his partners and hugged them to his side. "I don't know what I'd do without you two, or our children."

Silently, Luke and Lily looked at each other, closing their arms around John and smiling softly in acknowledgement of their feelings as they touched. Then Lily closed her eyes, snuggling up to John, and after a while she heard him sigh. "We'd better get to bed. It will be another long day with the Joneses tomorrow. And knowing us, it will take quite a while until we actually fall asleep."

Chuckling and giggling, the three of them got up from the sofa to go into their bedroom.

January 16th 2070 - Day 4 of the Jones investigation - early morning

Demon snuggled down into her big bed, waiting for her husband to emerge from the bathroom. She had just given Marcus his morning bottle, and was now lying in wait, like a lioness ready to pounce on her prey. Demon knew *exactly* what she wanted for her breakfast. Her lazy, lascivious plotting was



rudely interrupted by the sound of Matthew's commlink beeping, from where it lay on the bedside table.

Matthew erupted from the bathroom, his face set in a stony glower. He'd woken in a bad mood, the same mood he'd be in ever since the Joneses had arrived. Demon had planned to break that mood, but it looked as if the commlink might frustrate those plans. [And that's not the only thing around here that's getting frustrated,]

Demon thought to herself. The sight of her husband's naked body was making her hot and wet inside, and somehow the fierce look on his face, as he snatched the commlink off the table, only excited her more.

"Gideon." He barked at the bracelet.

Jackson's voice was apologetic. "Sorry to disturb you, Captain, but I thought you should know. A team of bloodhounds just managed to disrupt all power to deck 8. Our engineer told them that the connector they were looking at was part of the normal ship's equipment, but they decided not to believe her, and pulled it out. They blew every fuse on deck 8, and we have no power or heat there now. And the mess hall was half way through serving breakfast when the lights went out. It's chaos down there."

Matthew's lips had got tighter and tighter, as he listened to his second officer's report. His tone was absolutely flat when he replied. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Get repairs underway and I'll raise the incident with Ms. Jones. I have an interview with her in less than an hour."

Demon knew that Matthew had been dreading his turn in the interrogator's chair. He didn't need this. She watched as Matthew signed off, then he spun around and flung the commlink against the wall.

"Those fucking idiots! I'm going to space them, I swear I'm going to push each and every one of them out of an airlock then watch the bastards explode! I don't give a flying fuck if they court-martial me, I'm spacing the lot of them!" Matthew ranted as he paced back and forth across the bedroom.

Demon pulled herself up to kneel on the edge of the bed, and grabbed Matthew's arm as he passed her, pulling him to a standstill in front of her. She leaned forward until her breasts rubbed against the hairs on his bare chest, and held onto his shoulders, glaring up at him as she said, "Stop it! This is what they want! They want you angry and off guard. Nothing would please that bitch more than

you flying in there, losing your temper. Now calm down!"

As she spoke, Demon pulled herself closer to her husband, rubbing her hips gently against his. She could still see the fury in his hazel eyes, the firm set of his jaw and the hard line of his mouth as he glared down at her, but his mouth wasn't the only thing that was hard. Demon could feel his cock stiffening as it rubbed against her belly.

Matthew was breathing heavily. "Not now. You don't want it like this."

Demon pulled him tighter against her, rubbing her now hard nipples against his chest. "Yes, I do. I want it exactly like this, I want it right now, and I don't care if I limp for days."

Matthew's hands clamped round Demon's shoulders and pulled her off the bed, almost throwing her against the full length mirror on the wall. The contrast between the cold of the mirror against her back, and the heat of the Matthew's bare chest was exhilarating.

Matthew grabbed Demon's hair and pulled her head back, glaring down at her for a moment, before taking her mouth with his, forcing his tongue between her lips. The kiss was brutal and brief, then he broke it to lower his mouth to her neck. Demon moaned with mixed pleasure and pain as he bit down into the soft flesh where her neck met her shoulder. At the same time, with one hard thrust, he entered her.

Lily and Luke lay in bed, curled up together, Lily's head resting on Luke's chest, enjoying the peace and quiet. John had already gone to work, but Luke was working the nightshift, and thus had the day off. After John had left, Luke and Lily had checked on the twins, who'd been awake but 'talking' to each other contentedly, so they'd decided to crawl back into bed for a while, before the twins required their attention.

Playing with Lily's hair, Luke remembered something he'd wanted to ask her for a while, but he hadn't found the right moment so far. [I just hope this time I get around the foot-in-mouth disease.] Softly he asked, "Are you going to your martial arts class tonight?"

Lily, startled out of her own thoughts, lifted her head only long enough to give him a puzzled look. "Yes, of course." After her experience with Lucas Buck during the Excalibur's first visit to Eriadne, she'd sworn that no man would ever be able to overpower her physically again. So Lily had taken up training in Kirrak, a traditional Brakiri martial arts technique, with the guards on Eriadne. She'd trained ever since, only taking a break during her pregnancy. When she'd found out that a small group of Brakiri on the Excalibur met regularly for practice, Lily had asked if she could join them. After a test, they had accepted her into their group.

Luke knew how much Lily enjoyed these training sessions. He hesitated, trying to find a way of wording his concern so Lily wouldn't immediately explode, and decided to put it into a question. "Maybe it would be better if you didn't go?"

Lily lifted her head again, looking at him in wide-eyed surprise. "Why?"

"The block. What if something happens and you can't keep it up?"

Lily smiled. "I told you, once it's on, I don't have to actively keep it going. It's like turning a light

on--once that's done, the energy keeps flowing, until you turn it off."

"That's what I'm concerned about. Usually you turn it off knowingly, but it can happen if you touch the switch accidentally."

Lily frowned, irritation beginning to show, as she pushed herself up on her elbows. "I can't turn the telepathic block off accidentally, Luke. It takes a conscious effort to do it. What's your problem? You know how much I enjoy these training sessions with the Brakiri. Why do you want me to miss tonight's?"

"Yes, I know. But I also know the Brakiri can get pretty rough. What if one of them throws or hits you too hard, accidentally, and you get hurt, or black out for a moment? Then the block would be turned off, wouldn't it? Even though you didn't do it on purpose." Before Lily could protest, he continued, "And I know it's happened once already, even though you didn't tell me."

Lily's nostrils flared, and she sat up, glowering down at him. "Oh, I was wondering how long it would take you to find out about that. So what? Just because once I fainted for a moment when we played a bit too rough, does it have to happen again? And today of all days? You're starting to get over-protective again, Luke. I will go, and nothing will happen." She was gesticulating wildly with her hands.

Luke also sat up. "You didn't answer my question, Lily. If you faint, the block would be turned off, wouldn't it? On Eriadne, you once told me that if Ila is unconscious, she reverts to her true form, because unconsciousness is much deeper than sleep and thus robs her of all control. And you also said it was the same with your blocking ability." He was determined not to let this go, but kept his voice even, trying not to upset her any more.

Lily sighed, "Yes it would," then she went on hurriedly, "But I'll be careful, and so will the others. I won't be hurt, and I won't faint."

"Can you guarantee that? Absolutely, unequivocally?"

She grimaced. "Of course not. Absolute security doesn't exist, but..."

"DAMN it, Lily! Why is this one training session suddenly more important to you than John's fate? Our whole *family's* fate?"

Lily blanched as the words hung between them. Luke was blinking. He seemed taken aback by the fierceness of his own reaction. He seldom raised his voice, and hardly ever shouted, but Lily could still hear his voice ringing in her ears, in the eerie silence following his explosion. His words hurt, terribly.

"How can you say that? How COULD you? You know that isn't true!" She whirled away and swung her legs over the edge of the bed, squeezing her eyes shut and clenching her hands into fists, in an effort to regain her composure. [Or is he right?] a tiny voice asked inside her. She felt tears threatening to rise, and suppressed them angrily.

Lily felt the mattress shift, and Luke's arms come around her from behind, in a tender embrace, still strong enough to prevent her from escaping. "I'm sorry, Lily." His voice was soft now, like a gentle caress as he leaned his cheek against hers and continued, "But can't you see why I'm concerned? Why

are you being so stubborn about this?"

Lily slouched in his arms. "I don't know," she whispered, eyes still closed, "I just..." She shrugged and repeated, "I don't know." [How could I behave like this? Stupid, stubborn idiot! Was I really ready to endanger John, all of us, for one training session with the Brakiri?]

Lifting her legs onto the mattress again, she turned around in Luke's arms, burying her face in his shoulder and encircling his chest tightly with her arms. "I'm sorry, Luke, I just..." Lily had to stop, as confusion, shame, guilt, and anger overwhelmed her, tears forcing their way out between her lids. Between sobs, she forced herself to continue, "It's like an... an automatic... reaction. I can't help it some... times! You're r-right, and I'm... so stupid!"

Lily felt Luke lift his right hand and put it on the back of her head, rocking her gently. "I know, sweetheart, it's all right." Lily nodded against Luke's shoulder, sniffing loudly, and felt his lips touch the top of her head softly, before he added teasingly, "That's my Fire-Lily."

Laughing through her tears despite herself, Lily leaned back her head to look up at Luke. "Well, you certainly can't claim," she sniffled again, "that our relationship is boring."

Luke smiled, the love in his eyes soothing the confusion in Lily's heart, as he gently wiped away her tears. "About as boring as living near a volcano." After pressing a gentle kiss onto her forehead, he added, "Now stop crying, and let's think of something to compensate you for missing the training session, all right?"

Lily lifted her arms to encircle his neck as she sniffled, chewing her lower lip and frowning in concentration, as she pretended to think about it, then she gave Luke a naughty grin. "How about we have a little wrestling match?" She brought her legs around his hips, tightening them in a vice-like grip.

Luke groaned theatrically. "I don't have the slightest chance against you."

Lily's grin widened, and then she moved so quickly that Luke could only yelp in surprise, when he found himself on his back, with Lily kneeling astride him. Grinding her hips against his, she leaned forward until their noses almost touched, purring, "Don't worry, Sad Eyes, you know I won't hurt you--much."

Lily could see Luke's eyes darken with desire, and feel his cock twitch, making her juices flow as she continued to arouse him. She lowered her mouth on his, claiming it in a deep, passionate kiss.

Gideon walked along the corridor toward Ms. Joneses quarters, whistling softly. He hadn't felt this good in days. His back was sore, his neck ached where Deborah had bitten him, and he had numerous scratches and bruises in various interesting places around his body, but he still felt damned good.

He smiled as he walked, remembering how he had collapsed onto Deborah's back as they'd both climaxed, screaming in passion and lust. They hadn't fucked like that for a while, and she'd been right. It was exactly what he'd needed to release the anger and frustration, which had been building for days. [It sure beats shooting hoops.] Gideon had slowly pulled out of his wife, lowering her gently to the bed, then he had collapsed beside her, taking her into his arms, kissing her and stroking the scratches he'd left on her body. Deborah had wanted to get a regenerator to fix the marks she'd left on him, but he'd refused to let her move, wanting just to hold her close.

After a few minutes, during which their bodies had relaxed and their breathing steadied, Gideon had kissed Deborah gently, saying, "It won't be much longer. We just have to get through another few days and this will be over."

She'd looked up at him, puzzled. "Over how? How do you know?"

Gideon had refused to say more, but had kissed her again, then dressed rapidly and left for his appointment. He'd had to put on a sweater with a high neck, to hide one particularly deep bite mark that Deborah had inflicted on him.

Arriving at the door to Ms. Jones' quarters, he pressed the buzzer and waited for a response. After a full minute's waiting, Gideon grinned. "Command over-ride Gideon. Password 'Full House'." The doors slid open and the Captain marched in. Finding the tiny living area empty, he strode through to the bedroom.

Ms. Jones spun around and glared at him. She'd been admiring herself in the mirror there, and was obviously embarrassed. "How dare you! I didn't give my permission for you to enter!" She hissed at Gideon, eyes narrowed and bright with anger.

Gideon smiled innocently. "I was concerned when you didn't answer. We don't want anything unpleasant happening to our guests, now do we?" A quick glance around the room showed that it had been set up for a classic interrogation, with the victim's chair penned into a corner. Well, that would change.

The Captain dropped his gaze to Ms. Jones' feet, then allowed his eyes to travel slowly up her body, lingering on her hips and waist, before coming to rest on her cleavage. She was wearing a tight, low cut, leather vest that gave plenty to linger over. The jacket that she'd intended to wear over it still rested on the bed, so her arms were bare.

Gideon started to speak, without moving his eyes from Ms. Jones' breasts. "May I say what an attractive outfit that is, Ms. Jones? If I'm not mistaken, my wife has something very similar. Of course, she's rather more generously endowed than you, so she fills it rather better, but…" he paused, tilting his head to one side and leaning forward slightly, as if examining her breasts more closely, "I've heard that you can get bras that sort of lift and push things together. Maybe if you got one of those?" Gideon allowed his eyes to move upwards to Ms. Jones' very red face. "I'm sure my wife would be happy to help you look for one, if you like?"

The flush on Jones' face spread unattractively down her neck, and she hissed, "Sit down!" at Gideon, spinning on her heel and grabbing her jacket. While her back was turned, the Captain pulled the chair out of the corner, turned it around and placed it in the middle of the room. Lifting one foot, he rested it on the chair, then leaned his elbow on his knee.

He smiled that oh so innocent smile at the interrogator. "Now, how can I help you, Ms. Jones?"

This was going to be fun.

January 16th 2070 - Day 4 of the Jones investigation - late morning

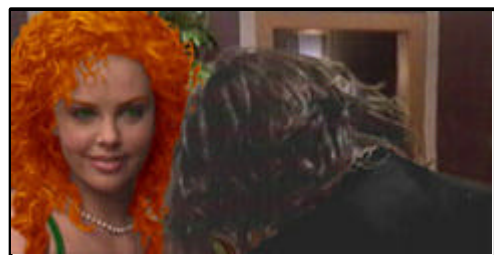
"You take a seat while I get us breakfast," Luke said, smiling at Lily. They had decided to get brunch in the nearest mess hall, fortunately unaffected by the power disruption on deck 8, since they had both been too lazy to make any themselves. Lily smiled and nodded back at him. "No sausages for me, please. I can only eat that stuff for breakfast when I'm out camping."

While Luke joined the small queue at the counter, Lily took the twins by their hands and slowly led them to an area of the mess hall that had low armchairs and a sofa. She lifted Faylinn and Dasha onto the middle of the sofa, sitting them well back, so Luke and she would frame them while eating breakfast from the low coffee table there, and could intervene if necessary. [Not that Dasha is likely to do anything that would need intervention.] Lily smiled as the little boy looked around the mess hall, his head the only part of his body that was moving. He had that serious expression on his face, which always gave onlookers the impression he was registering every detail. [And who knows?] Lily thought.

Faylinn, on the other hand, had already crawled to the far end of the couch, and holding on to the arm, had scrambled onto her knees, as she turned to and fro, her eyes darting around as if she was afraid to miss anything. If Dasha got into any trouble or mischief, it was usually because he was following and helping his sister. [Just like his physical father, too loyal for his own good. I just don't know why everybody keeps saying that Faylinn's character is too much like her mother's for comfort.] she thought to herself, amused. Faylinn had a sunny character, with a fiery temperament *and* a temper, but the latter could just as well have been inherited from her father, as this morning had shown. Lily shook that thought away. Bygones were bygones.

Giving the twins a stern mental order that they were not to move down from their seats, Lily looked around, and noticed someone to her left. She remained standing as she watched Frog Boy, a tray with used crockery in his hands, moving towards the exit, which led him in her general direction. She hadn't seen him earlier, but it seemed the telepath watchdog had noticed her. [I bet you have, the moment I entered!] He was giving her a polite nod and smile. Lily smiled back and called out cheerily, "Good morning, Mr. Jones." [It sure is. So much fun to be had--for me, at least.]

When Frog Boy reached her, he put the tray on a nearby table, before saying in his slightly accented English, "A good morning indeed, Ms. Morgaine." As he bowed slightly, he took her right hand and lifted it to his lips, breathing a kiss on its back.



Lily gave him a half flattered, half amused smile as she curtsied. "It's not often that I get greeted in such a gentlemanly way. I think I'll have to teach my lovers to do that."

Frog Boy laughed lightly, looking into her eyes as he said, "Your grace inspires such behavior, Mademoiselle." Only then did he let go of her hand.

"Don't you think 'Madame' would be the more appropriate term?" Lily asked, grinning and indicating her children, who were watching Frog Boy closely. "And please, call me Lily."

The telepath smiled. "Thank you, Lily. I would like to offer the same courtesy to you, but I am not allowed to disclose my name." Lily nodded in understanding, and he continued, "To answer your question: In France, every unmarried woman is traditionally called 'Mademoiselle', whether she has given birth to children or not." He turned serious, frowning slightly. "I hope I haven't offended you."

Lily giggled. "Oh, it would take much more than that." [Like threatening my family, you rat! Hmm that's not really fair--to the rats. I'm a supporter of animal welfare, after all, though I'm not fond of this particular frog.]

Frog Boy, oblivious to her thoughts, bowed his head. "I am glad. I would hate to draw the scorn of such a beautiful woman."

"I don't think many women could scorn you, not for long." Lily gave him a smile that was just this side of flirtatious.

"You are too polite." Jones bowed his head again, smiling.

[If only you knew how right you are...] Lily managed to keep her smile, though inside, she was sneering at him.

"And these are your children, obviously. Beautiful like their mother." Jones gave the twins a smile, which they didn't quite return, as if they'd picked up their mother's feelings towards this stranger through the link.

"Faylinn and Dasha, yes." Lily stood behind the sofa, giving Jones the first real smile as she gently tickled the back of their heads, making them giggle.

"Ah, their smiles are exactly like their mother's. Comme la soleil levant."

Lily gave him a curious look. "What does that mean?"

For Jules Deneuve, Lilith Morgaine had immediately stood out among the group which had greeted the investigation team on the Excalibur, and not just because of her size. The sparkle in her green eyes had told him immediately, even with his telepathic sense blocked, that the promise of fire her coloring gave would be kept by her personality. He'd always preferred women with a temperament, women who could give as good as they got, without renouncing their femininity. And Lilith Morgaine certainly didn't, if her choice of clothes was anything to go by.

Jules wouldn't mind heating himself on that fire, but he knew that he'd have to be careful not to get burned, and couldn't allow his personal agenda to get in the way of the investigation. [This is crucial. If I mess it up, my career will be finished. If nothing happens, well, there are many other women out there waiting to be discovered. But if things should develop in the right direction...]

They'd had a surprisingly good start. He hadn't expected Matheson's partner to chat with him so amicably. Of course, he couldn't use his telepathy to confirm the impressions he got from the five senses all 'mundanes' had, so there was a chance she was only pretending. [Then again, there is also the possibility that although they are partners and have two children together, Matheson, Raven, and Morgaine--Lily--have an open relationship. That may be why they don't have a legally binding contract.]

Jules had decided to test the waters. If Lily wasn't sincere, she'd soon draw back.

As he'd intended, Lily asked for the meaning of that French sentence he'd woven into their conversation. But before Jules could answer her question, a voice behind him said, "Like the rising sun."

Jules turned, covering his surprise at seeing Dr. Raven standing there, with a fully loaded tray in his hands. He hadn't heard him arrive. "Good morning, Doctor."

"Good morning, Mr. Jones." Raven put the tray onto the table, then hugged his red-haired lover against his left side, kissing the top of her head before looking at Jules again. "I hope I translated that correctly. It's been a while since I used French."

"I wasn't aware that you speak it at all," Jules replied, "But yes, that was correct."

"Oh, it's sort of a hobby, that's why it's not in my résumé. I always had a knack for languages."

Lily giggled as she looked up at Raven. "John is envious. He has to work hard to learn languages, and you just master them in no time."

"Well, John gets his revenge when it comes to cooking." The doctor smiled down at his partner, then gave Jules a searching look. "Comment vont les tests? Est-ce que tout va bien?" His voice was polite, as he inquired about the tests, but Jules thought he detected an undercurrent of hostility in his voice. [I wish I could use my telepathy to confirm it, but if my flirting with his lover makes him jealous, all the better. That draws his attention away from the investigation.]

"J'ai l'intention de contrôler quand j'arriverai à Medbay, mais lorsque je suis parti hier soir, tout allait bien," Jules replied smoothly, thinking, [You know very well that the tests are going well, but we didn't find anything so far,] then added, "I must say your pronunciation and intonation are remarkable, Dr. Raven."

The doctor nodded his thanks. "I do my best."

"Oh yes, he is very remarkable," Lily added in a low voice. She was looking directly at Jules, her amazingly green eyes, which had barely left him since she'd snuggled against her lover's side, full of promise.

At that moment, Lily's daughter decided she had sat still for long enough. Faylinn turned onto her side, slid down from the sofa and under the low table, followed by her brother, after a moment's hesitation. They appeared again on the other side of the table, crawling toward the far end of the room with amazing speed. Raven let go of Lily, to go after them.

"Your daughter seems to be a lively girl," Jules said, quirking the corners of his mouth up in amusement.

"Yes, she's always looking to get herself into mischief," Lily replied, looking at him with an unreadable smile on her lips, which disappeared as Raven came back with the twins under his arms. He set them onto the sofa again, chiding softly.

Jules suppressed a sense of satisfaction, telling himself that he still didn't know if Lily's behavior was for real. [Time will tell.] He spoke. "Well, I'm afraid my duties call me from this pleasurable conversation. Enjoy your breakfast. Dr. Raven, Lily." As he graciously bowed his head, he lowered his eyes, then drew them up along Lily's body as he straightened, lingering on her cleavage for just a moment. When he briefly met her eyes, he knew she had noticed, by the subtle raise of her eyebrow and that tiny smile which was on her lips again. In one smooth motion, Jules turned to collect his tray from the other table, then strode away, humming to himself.

Lily and Luke silently watched Jones until he'd left the mess hall. Then Luke said, his voice as neutral as his face, "I'd been watching you two for a while, but I didn't want to spoil your fun."

"Oh, your timing was impeccable." Lily said sarcastically, then turned and looked up at Luke. For a second, they locked eyes silently, seriously, then broke into big grins.

"Well, we'd better eat our breakfast before it goes moldy." Luke briefly hugged Lily against his chest, before they sat down either side of the twins, and Luke distributed the contents of the tray between Lily and himself. Fortunately, the toast with scrambled eggs and the other cooked dishes were covered, so they hadn't cooled much. For Faylinn and Dasha, Luke had brought a few halved slices of bread, which they immediately started chewing on, eagerly.

"He's disgusting. Using his good looks and his charms to get at other people..." Lily knew she didn't have to say who she was talking about, and she didn't even try to hide her dislike of this particular Mr. Jones.

"Well, you just did the same," Luke pointed out.

"Only because at the moment, that is the one way I can think of to beat Frog Boy. I have to give him a taste of his own medicine." Lily turned her head and looked into Luke's eyes, seeing him frown and look down at her hands in her lap. Only then did she realize that she was wiping her right hand with her skirt, as if Mr. Jones' touch had left traces. She stopped and clasped her hands in her lap, saying roughly, "I feel soiled after 'flirting' with him. I wish we had a water shower." She paused, then sighed. "I miss my bath."

Luke gave her a concerned look, reaching over their children's heads to cup her cheek in his left hand. The twins continued munching bread, but were watching their parents intently. "You don't have to do this, Lily." Luke's voice clearly conveyed his love, but also how much he was worried for her.

Lily smiled sadly, leaning her head into his hand. Her voice was barely audible when she spoke. "Yes I do. I have to do whatever I can to help John against these bastards. If I didn't, and they..." She stopped abruptly. "I couldn't live with myself anymore." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, then looked at Luke with determination. "I will do whatever is necessary. I'll survive being soiled. I can brush it off." Lily made an effort to smile, and started talking again before Luke could say anything. "So, let's finally concentrate on this delicious looking and smelling breakfast. Don't you agree?" she added, as she took some scrambled egg from her toast and fed it to Dasha. Her son smiled back at her as he munched.

January 16th 2070 - Day 4 of the Jones investigation - afternoon

It cost John Matheson a huge effort to keep a straight face as he waited for Snoopy's--[Don't call him that, you have to stay serious!]-tirade to end. When the telepath watchdog finally had to take a breath, John butted in.

"Listen, Mr. Jones, there was obviously a misunderstanding between Salonn," he gestured to their

Deputy Head of Engineering, a Minbari female, "and the Captain, when Gideon told her that she should wait to upgrade the power converter until after you'd finished your inspection."

A furious Mr. Jones had called the bridge a while earlier, when he had discovered that a group of Excalibur engineers was working on a power converter in the engine room, which the Joneses had already inspected. "For all I know, your people could have been trying to secretly relocate whatever device is blocking all telepaths on this ship! You probably thought we wouldn't give the places we'd already checked a second look! I demand an immediate explanation, in person, and I hope for your sake that you'll have a good one!" He'd signed off before the Captain had had a chance to say anything.

With a wicked grin, Gideon had asked his XO to handle the situation 'in person and immediately', as he was too occupied. Which he was--with a deck of cards. Although he hadn't said anything to that effect, Jones had clearly been scandalized that the Captain didn't deem this matter important enough to come to the engine room himself. Which was probably one more reason why he had started ranting as soon as he'd seen John in the open doorway.

"A misunderstanding?" Jones snorted, eyeing the Minbari dubiously.

Salonn's eyes flashed dangerously, as she drew herself up even more than usual. "Are you implying that I am a liar? Minbari do not lie."

Jones seemed to realize that he was on dangerous ground, as he glibly assured her, "I am implying that the answer to your question may have been phrased in a way to provoke such a misunderstanding."

John narrowed his eyes, and over Salonn's protests, said softly, "I suggest you be more careful with such unsubstantiated accusations, especially in front of witnesses." His low voice carried a clear warning. He could see Jones take in the small group of engineers standing back, but still within earshot, then continued, "But as a show of goodwill, and in accordance with our orders to help you in this investigation, Salonn will personally show your team exactly what changes have been made to the power converter.

Jones glared at him, and John could see that he had to swallow another retort before speaking. "Very well. As a show of goodwill," he imitated John's tone, "I will not report this to Ms. Jones, but I *will* do so if another incident of this kind should occur."

"I can assure you that won't be necessary. We will postpone any further upgrades on the whole ship until after the conclusion of this investigation. Should any time-critical upgrades or repairs be required, you will be advised of those in advance, so your team members can supervise them."

Jones pressed his lips together, eyeing John, then nodded curtly, and without further ado turned to Salonn. "If you'd do me the courtesy of showing me and my team exactly what you did to the power converter now?"

John couldn't quite keep a grin from his face when he said, "And I wish you a good day, too, Mr. Jones," before leaving for the bridge again.

January 16th 2070 - Day 4 of the Jones investigation - evening

Matthew Gideon raised his eyebrows in amusement, when he heard Lily's laugh, accompanied by Deborah's coughing, coming through the open door of the bedroom. The sisters had retreated to merge, while Matthew talked strategy with Lily's partners. [Not that I expect them to 'talk' any less strategy than we do. I should just be happy that their strategies usually coincide with ours. More or less.] He smiled at the tiny redhead's partners. "Seems like the merge ended. It's good to hear that Lily hasn't lost her sense of humor."

"If anything, it's become even more wicked lately," Luke said, smiling also.

"They all have an amazing sense of humor," John added, "I really admire the sisters. After all the Vorlons put them through, they'd have more than enough reason to be emotional wrecks. But their union saved them."

Lily's shrieking laughter made the men chuckle.

"From the sound of that, I think there's a strong chance that they're talking about us, or men in general." Matthew raised his eyebrows, giving the other men a concerned look. "I think I'd better go get Deborah out of there, as she's no doubt the ringleader again. I'll probably be hearing seemingly innocent, but all too well-timed comments, for the rest of the night." Rising from the easy chair he'd sat in, he caught John and Luke, still sitting on the couch, trying to suppress grins. Matthew narrowed his eyes to glare down at them. "I'd expect more sympathy from you two. You have only one woman to cope with between the two of you, and a tiny one at that!"

Grinning widely, John looked up at Gideon. "And you really think that her physical size bears any relation to her wickedness?"

Matthew grinned. "Probably not." He cocked his head toward the bedroom, from where loud, raucous laughter could now be heard. "Let's get them out of there before they die of oxygen deprivation."

Angel, Demon, and Lily sat in a triangle on the floor of Lily's bedroom, eyes closed and holding hands. They had merged their minds to replenish Lily and in turn the telepathic block she kept up, while John, Luke and Matthew were in the living room, exchanging their experiences with the Joneses. The children were in the Medbay crèche, from where they would collect them later.

Angel heard Lily sigh contentedly, as they ended the merge and let go of each other's hands. "Ah, I feel born again, and clean."

"What do you mean, clean? Because of Frog Boy?" Angel asked, opening her eyes and stretching. Even without the shield that had surrounded the castle on Eriadne, which had enhanced and nurtured their powers, a merge always had a relaxing and energizing effect. During their merge, they had exchanged details of their encounters with the telepathic investigators, so Angel and Demon knew how disgusting Lily found the French Jones.

Lily nodded, frowning. "I know I have to use his own methods against him, but that doesn't make it any less wrong. And to have to be friendly--more than friendly--to him, when I really want to..." she broke off, taking a deep breath. "Well, none of that now. If it helps John that I flirt with Frog Boy, I'll do it."

Angel gave her an understanding smile. "Just as long as you don't have to sleep with him..." Angel

trailed off, staring at Lily open-mouthed, a chill running down her spine, as she saw a strange expression cross Lily's face. "Lily, no! You wouldn't! You couldn't!" The words rushed out of her mouth, while she prayed that she was wrong.

Her red-haired sister gave her a gentle smile. "I can tell you that I will only go as far as is absolutely necessary to help John. Not one step further." Raising an eyebrow, Lily looked from Angel to Demon, who Angel could see looked just as stricken as she felt. Lily's voice was deceptively light and teasing as she said, "Besides, do you think because I'm free with my men that means I'm easy?"

Angel understood Lily's wish to change to a less troubling subject all too well, and was determined not to let her little sister down as she replied, "No, that only means you're a slut," grinning naughtily.

"What?!" Lily flashed her teeth as she grinned back. "I'm no more a slut than Demon or you!"

"Oh, yes you are. Any woman who needs more than one man is a slut. The state Luke is in sometimes when he arrives at work, I'd say two are barely enough for you, so make that Slut with a capital 'S L U T'."

"Pocket Venus Slut, to be exact," Demon added seriously.

"Pocket Venus?" Lily giggled. "Where does that come from?"

"Well, that's what Matthew thought when he first saw you." Demon had an amused smile on her lips, and Lily grinned widely.

"Now that's what I call a compliment!"



"Only you would consider that a compliment!" Angel shook her head, her blue eyes twinkling with mirth.

"I wasn't talking about the 'slut' bit." Lily leaned forward and gave Angel a wicked grin. "Besides, who's the one lusting after a different actor or musician every week?"

Angel cleared her throat. "Ah, that can't be me..."

For some reason, Demon started coughing just then, and Lily spluttered with laughter. "Riiight, of course not. You're just as much a slut as I am, if not worse."

Before Angel could protest, Demon spoke. "Hmm. So, if Lily is Pocket Venus Slut; what does that make Angel?" The tall blonde lifted her eyebrows as she studied her sister. "Red Slut Angelicas?"

Lily shrieked with laughter, and even Angel couldn't quite keep a grin from her face after she'd blown them a raspberry. "And what about you, Demon? Are you *Queen* Slut?"

Demon lifted her eyebrows again, straightening her back, and setting her face into the most perfect impersonation of British snobbery Angel had ever seen. "Slut Regina, of course. You may bow before me." She retained the regal expression and composure, despite the loud laughter that answered her.

Suddenly, Demon felt Matthew's arms around her. She hadn't seen him enter, since she was sitting with her back to the door, and with her sisters laughing so loudly, she hadn't heard anything. She leaned into her husband's kiss, then snuggled against him as he settled next to her, while John and Luke sat down next to Lily.

"Did I hear that right? Was that Regina or Va..." Before he could finish, Demon hit him on the arm. Hard. "Hey! I'll have to report you for domestic violence!" Matthew gave her a hurt look.

"Don't worry, darling. I'll kiss it better later." Demon gave Matthew a wicked grin.

Lily and Angel, who had already been literally rolling on the floor with laughter, started laughing--or more correctly, shrieking--even louder.

Matthew gave the two women a puzzled look, then asked Luke, "Doctor, what's your prognosis? Is there any hope for them?" Which set the two women off even more.

Luke leaned forward, to look first at Lily, then at Angel, his face serious. "That looks like a bad overdose of British humor, for which there is no known cure." He looked up at Demon, raising his eyebrows in an unspoken question.

"What could make you think I have anything to do with my sisters' state?" Demon looked at Luke with wide, innocent eyes.

Protesting sounds, which could have been words or not, came from Angel before she collapsed on the floor again.

"Well, the fact that you're the only one still vertical, and not laughing yourself senseless, might be an indication, don't you think?" Luke smiled.

"Rats," Demon muttered, "foiled again," which sent her sisters into another paroxysm of laughter, as she'd known it would.

Matthew chuckled, then put his arm around Demon's shoulder and kissed her cheek. "I think it's time to go get Marcus and take him home."

"And I have to get to work." Raven grimaced, his words finally stopping Lily's laughter.

"Already?" she whined, as she pushed herself up into a sitting position, wiping tears of laughter from her face. Then she moaned. "My belly hurts!"

"Well, I'm sure the good doctor will fix you right up if you go to Medbay with him," John said with a chuckle, as Lily snuggled in between him and Luke.

Demon couldn't help but chortle, as she saw that the tiny redhead's face was still flushed from laughing.

"I surely will, and yes, I'm afraid it's time for me to leave." Luke sighed theatrically.

Angel, still giggling and holding her belly, sat up. "Poor Luke," she cooed, her grin belying the compassionate tone in her voice.

"And I was just thinking that we're a bit short on staff tonight. Want to volunteer?" Luke grinned wickedly at Angel, who laughed.

"No, thank you, Doc. I'm sure you'll be able to handle the Joneses without me." Her lips curled into a naughty grin. "And I'm sure you'd prefer to have John help you with handling Lily."

Everybody grinned when Luke blushed.

January 17th 2070 - Day 5 of the Jones investigation - early morning

Lily had just finished dressing the twins when she felt Demon link to her, announcing her arrival. The tiny redhead called for the door to open, while slowly walking Faylinn and Dasha, both clutching her hands, from their bedroom into the living room.

"Ready?" Demon asked, holding Marcus' hand, as they stood outside. The little boy wobbled slightly as he stood by his mother, but just about stayed upright by hanging on to his mother's skirt.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Stepping out, Lily flashed the tall blonde a wicked smile. *[[I really shouldn't be looking forward to this as much as I am.]]* They fell into a slow gait, so their children were able to keep up, as they made their way to the next bullet car stop. Faylinn, Dasha and Marcus were conversing in their own special language, which consisted of a wild mix of the few spoken 'words' they had learned, with undecipherable noises.

Demon mentally chuckled. *[[Frog Boy won't be pleased.]]*

[[Which pleases me.]] Turning serious, Lily added, *[[John triple-checked the warrant the Joneses have, and they really don't have any way to force us into participating in the tests. It may be arguable with Angel, but what can they do?]]*

They nodded at a passing Gaim crew member as Demon replied, *[[Nothing but wait until Matthew gets a decision from Sheridan, as to whether civilians have to participate or not. He's very scrupulous when it comes to protecting his crew members' rights.]]* She frowned. *[[Matthew told me yesterday that we just have to get through another few days, then this will be over. I have no idea why or how he'd know that, and he refused to tell me more.]]*

Lily gave her a puzzled look as they arrived at the bullet car stop. *[[Sounds as if he's up to something, though I can't even begin to fathom what he could do to get rid of the Joneses. And if he won't even tell you...]]*

Demon raised her eyebrows and shook her head. *[[I only know he's sure that whatever he's doing will help John--for good.]]*

Lily let her oldest sister feel her gratitude. *[[If he can, I'll have to find a way to thank him properly.]]*

Demon narrowed her eyes. *[[Hands off my man!]]* Her amusement was clear through the link, and the twinkle in her hazel eyes.

Lily pouted. *[[Aw, you always spoil my fun.]]*

The tiny redhead giggled as Demon started specifying all the times she had so *not* spoiled Lily's fun, continuing until well after the bullet car had arrived and they were sitting inside, on their way to Medbay.

Jules Deneuve sat in a side room off Medbay, which Luke Raven had assigned to him as a temporary office. He was going through the test results with Ines, and wished she had finished and left for her interviews. His boss was in a foul mood--it had gone downhill after her interview with Lt. Matheson two days before, and gotten worse after she'd talked to Gideon the previous morning. *[I would love to have been a fly on the wall during that interview.]* Jules carefully kept his face neutral. While Ines was for the moment concentrating on the datapad containing the test results, he knew her to be very perceptive.

"As you see, there is still nothing to indicate that there is any kind of virus on board, which could cause the telepathic block," he offered. "I doubt if we'll find anything."

"I'll decide that," Ines replied roughly, and after several seconds, lifted her dark eyes to look into his. "You scheduled them for this morning?"

Jules bent his head in acknowledgement. "As you ordered me to."

"Good. They're the only real unknown quantities among the people on this ship. Their back story seems legitimate, but information about the planet they were found on is more or less limited to the Excalibur's reports. So we don't know what happened to them while they were living there. I want them tested very thoroughly, right down to their genetic structure."

Jules nodded, then through the transparent section of the wall, he saw movement in the main room of Medbay. "Well, talk of the devil." He smiled softly.

Ines turned to look out, and for a moment they both watched Deborah Gideon and Lilith Morgaine enter Medbay with their children. They were joined by Angelique Denier who was already at work, and Luke Raven, who hugged and kissed Lily and the twins. Jules hoped that since it was the end of his shift, the Excalibur's CMO wouldn't stick around to supervise the tests on the three women and their children, but the Frenchman doubted he'd get that lucky. *[I'll have to find a way to distract him, so I can set aside some blood samples for the additional tests. Raven is another person who's much too perceptive for my taste.]*

He felt Ines' eyes on him and gave her a questioning look.

"Be thorough, very thorough, Jules. I will not tolerate failure." The threat in her voice and eyes was unmistakable.

Jules stood, giving her a cool look. "I have never before let anything prevent me from getting my job done. I have no intention of letting that happen now."

Lily had hardly noticed Frog Boy entering Medbay's main room, when she heard Angel's voice in her

head, *[[Turn on the charm, Lily.]]*

"Isn't it always on?" she replied softly, through gritted teeth, suppressing a grin at Angel's answering snort.

"Madame. Mesdemoiselles." Frog Boy gave them one of his most charming smiles. "How good of you to come by. Just give us a few more minutes, and we'll be ready to start the tests..."

"I don't think so," Demon interrupted him. There was no mistaking the steel beneath the softness of her voice.

The brown-haired Jones gave Demon a puzzled look. "Pardon me? I'm afraid I'm not quite sure what you mean..."

[[No wonder--his one brain cell isn't capable of following you, Demon.]] Angel commented.

Demon continued as if she hadn't heard, "It means that we won't play guinea pigs for you. Anything you need to know, including the results of our telepathy tests, can be found in our medical files. No need to do further testing."

Frog Boy's eyes took in Angel and then Lily. He gave her a soft smile, causing Demon to send, *[[Eww! I see what you mean.]]*

Lily managed to keep her face straight--just--as he talked to her. "Mademoiselle--Lily--you know that we provided Dr. Raven," he gestured at Luke, who stood beside her, with Dasha in his arms, "with full descriptions of the tests we will carry out. All we'll need from you is a blood sample."

"Yes, I do know, Mr. Jones," Lily smiled apologetically, "But that doesn't change my mind."

Jones turned to Luke. "You have approved of these tests, have you not?"

Luke nodded. "I did."

Jones looked at Angel now. "And you work in Medbay, Miss Denier. Don't you trust Dr. Raven's judgment?"

"Oh I do, but I have a mind of my own, and I'm afraid Luke wasn't able to convince any of us to participate in your tests. Nothing personal, we just don't like it." She gave Jones such a sugar-sweet smile that Lily had to clear her throat to avoid laughing.

"Convince you? You should be aware--" Frog Boy looked at Demon again, "and you especially, Madame, as the Captain's wife--that participation in these tests is compulsory for everyone on board. Your husband has been ordered to support us in this investigation, and our legal authority..."

"I have looked at your authority document very closely, and I've arrived at the conclusion that it doesn't cover the civilians on board." Demon interrupted, giving Jones a cool look, which was in stark contrast to her gently stroking Marcus' blond locks, as he pressed his head against her shoulder, refusing to look at the stranger. In contrast, Dasha in his Dad's arms, and Faylinn standing beside Lily, were watching Jones closely.

Before Frog Boy could protest, Luke said, "I'm afraid Demon is right. You can't force them to

participate in the tests."

The telepath watchdog looked at him in amazement. "That is impossible."

"Is there a problem?"

Mr. Jones' lips compressed into two thin lines, then he deliberately relaxed his face before turning around to face Boss Bitch.

"Not at all," Demon said calmly before he could speak, "We have just informed Mr. Jones here that we won't let you use our children or ourselves as guinea pigs."

Boss Bitch merely raised her eyebrows as she shot Frog Boy a cold questioning look.

[[Hey, we might get Frogs' legs for lunch,]] Angel quipped, accompanied by evil mental giggling.

Lily bit down on her lip, and she saw the corners of Demon's mouth twitch ever so slightly as she replied, *[[No thank you! I don't want to die of food poisoning!]]*

Jones meanwhile interjected softly, "Mrs. Gideon claims that our warrant doesn't include civilians on the ship..."

"Ridiculous!" Boss Bitch turned her cold look at Demon, who simply returned it, unimpressed.

[[Does she think she can outdo the Ice Queen?]] Lily was highly amused.

"I'm afraid not," Luke spoke up, ignoring Boss Bitch's glare as he explained, "I did take a look at that document myself, and I'm afraid that in fact it does not apply to civilians on board of the Excalibur."

"That is impossible!"

"I can point out the paragraph in question, and spell it out in language understandable even for you," Demon offered softly, causing Boss Bitch's face to redden with anger.

"Well, assuming you're right, that would just mean I'll have to get another authority document applying to civilians too, won't I?" She shot Demon an evil grin. "And in the meantime," she turned her glare to Angel, "Ms. Denier is part of the crew, and thus will have to let us take a blood sample to test."

"Now that is very arguable. The relevant paragraph, as you'll see, is not very specific about whether it applies to civilian crew members. And I can assure you, my husband would never tolerate any crew member's basic rights being infringed upon. He will not order Angel to participate in your tests before he receives confirmation from President Sheridan."

"And neither will I," Luke added, looking calmly at the furious leader of the telepath investigators, "And that's why you may find a few other members of the crew refusing to participate in the tests."

Boss Bitch's eyes narrowed but she said nothing, instead glaring at each of them in turn, then she turned to Frog Boy, clearly furious. "You will look at our warrant *very* closely, and if indeed there is such a loophole in it, I want you to inform me, *immediately*, so I can crucify the incompetent idiot who wrote it--first with words, and when we get back to HQ, in person!" Boss Bitch's eyes gleamed dangerously and her lips curled in an evil smile, leaving no doubt in Lily's mind that she would carry

out her threats. She listened as the other woman continued coldly, "If there is no such loophole," her glare wandered over the sisters and Luke, "these women and their children will be recalled for testing *instantly*. I don't care if they're sleeping, eating, shitting or fucking at that time, they will come *immediately*."

"Yes, Ma'am." Frog Boy hadn't finished the second word before Boss Bitch had turned on her heels and stormed out of Medbay.

"One might think she's having a bad week," Demon muttered, whispering something into Marcus' ear and kissing the top of his head while Luke, Angel and Lily had to suppress their chuckles. Lily could even have sworn she'd seen the corners of Frog Boy's mouth twitch, but when he turned to face them again, he was serious.

"Ladies, please keep yourself ready. As you probably realized, when Ms. Jones told me to recall you *instantly*, she meant INSTANTLY, and she is not the patient kind."

"Oh, you don't say?" Angel said lightly, then turned to her sisters. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do. See you later." She hugged and kissed her nephews and niece, murmuring, "Sleep well," accompanied by a naughty smile as she walked past Luke to one of the side rooms.

Demon also excused herself, saying that Marcus would want a snack soon, and left without paying any more attention to Frog Boy.

Luke put Dasha down, telling Lily, "I'll only be a minute or two, then I'll join you. Just have to finish something."

Lily smiled up at him and nodded. "We'll be here."

Luke went into his office, and Lily took the twins to one side so they were out of the way, before sitting on the floor with them. She positioned herself so she had both in her sights and in easy reach--it wouldn't do to have them run off and wreak havoc in Medbay. [Although in the room where they're conducting those awful tests... Bad girl, don't even think of it, or the children will pick it up and do it!]

Frog Boy had started walking towards his office, but then turned and came back, squatting down in front of Lily. "Mademoiselle," he softly said, "You really got me into trouble."

Lily looked at him, smiling apologetically. "I'm sorry, Mr. Jones, but we are old-fashioned girls. Well, in some ways at least." She looked at the twins and grinned, seeing Frog Boy smile as her eyes met his. [Don't waste your smiles on me!] Lily continued, "Demon and I may not behave like mother hens, but we're protective of our families. Unless it's absolutely necessary, we won't let anyone dabble with our children's genes. And I'm sure that would have been part of the tests, wouldn't it?"

Jones reminded her softly, "But we only test blood samples. And Dr. Raven did approve of the test procedures..."

Lily nodded. "He did, but he knows very well that I am not fond of tests of any kind. Even during my pregnancy, I'd only let him conduct the most basic examinations. And while Angel works in Medbay, she specializes in naturopathy and traditional Brakiri medicine. We have a rather naturalistic approach to these things." She smiled. "But if President Sheridan orders us to participate in your tests, we will do so, of course."

"Thank you." Frog Boy smiled charmingly, and then before he rose, he let his eyes drop to her cleavage for just a moment, his smile changing to appreciative and suggestive.

Lily smiled back and bowed her head, letting her hair fall over her face, so Jones couldn't see the look of contempt and disgust that crossed it. [You'd better remember this nice view, as if I have my way, you won't get to see more--only over my dead body! I really hope whatever Matthew is planning will work out, before...]

Suddenly, tiny hands on her arms grabbed Lily's attention, and she found Faylinn and Dasha looking at her with big eyes, clearly concerned by her brooding. Lily pulled her son and daughter into her lap and hugged them. [*Oh, no my darlings, everything is all right with Ma! It's just that I don't like that man very much, but he won't be here much longer.*] She sent her love, and felt their moods brighten immediately, as they returned the same emotion.

Luke's arms suddenly enclosed the three of them, as he knelt down behind her and said softly into her ear, "How about cuddling *me* a bit at home?"

Lily turned her head and leaned to the side so he could see the grin on her face. "Why Doctor, I think that's exactly the kind of medicine we need..."

January 17th 2070 - Day 5 of the Jones investigation - later that morning

Luke opened his eyes to look up at Lily, standing beside the bed, as he felt her run her hand through his hair--something she loved to do, especially now that it was growing. Luke took her hand and turned it so he could kiss the inside of her palm.

After Luke had eaten, they had left Faylinn and Dasha in their room to play and retreated to their own bedroom. Luke had started undressing, but Lily had silently taken over. Tired after working through the night, Luke had just stood there, eyes closed, and he had relaxed as she'd unbuttoned his shirt. He didn't know if it was because he was unable to anticipate her next move with his eyes closed, but he'd found the soft touches of her lips and hands on his newly uncovered skin incredibly erotic. By the time she had arrived at his briefs, she'd had to cut them off, as it would have been impossible to get them past his swollen cock in any way that wasn't painful for him. After guiding him to lie down in the middle of their king-sized bed, Lily had whispered to him to relax and let her do all the work. Luke had murmured contentedly, enjoying the warmth spreading through his body as she'd taken her time, continuing to caress and arouse him. When he'd finally come, his orgasm had spread through his whole body in slow, intense waves, and he'd drifted off into a light sleep soon afterwards.

Luke rubbed his cheek against Lily's palm, looking up at her again, and smiled, trying to let her know without words how much he loved her. Lily returned his smile.

Lily hadn't been able to resist running her hand through Luke's hair when she'd stood next to their bed--his thick, dark blond hair which was so silky to the touch. His kiss on her palm left her skin tingling, and when Luke looked up at her lovingly, she instinctively returned his smile, feeling her love for her partner well up inside.

Lily bent down to sing softly into his ear, "*Did I tell you lately that I love you...*"

Luke's smile grew, as he turned his head to look at her, murmuring in a sleepy voice, "You did, but I can't hear it often enough." He pulled her down on top of him into a long, languid kiss, whispering as they broke it, "I love you too. With all my heart and soul."

Lily cupped his face between her hands, looking into his brown eyes for a long second, before placing a kiss between his brows. "Sleep now. I'll take Faylinn and Dasha to the orchard."

Luke drowsily grinned up at her. "You'll have to do the laundry afterwards..."

Lily laughed, and after a last soft kiss on his lips, slid off the bed to tuck him in. He turned onto his side and curled up, and was already half asleep when Lily pushed an errant strand of dark blond hair out of his eyes, whispering, "Sweet dreams."

January 17th 2070 - Day 5 of the Jones investigation - at the same time in Medbay

[She will kill me! Merde, qu'est-ce que je fais? I can't *not* tell her, as she'd find out soon anyway, and then I'd really be done for--but if I *do* tell her...] Jules slumped forward in his chair, leaning his head in his hands heavily, as if it would fall off otherwise. [It just might, soon!]

Ines may have been controlled when Jules had to confirm what Mrs. Gideon and Dr. Raven had claimed: their legal authority was not clear about covering civilians on board the Excalibur, even if they were part of the crew. [But if I *do* tell her just how many crew members are civilians...] He stared blindly at the list of names on his datapad. Nearly one third of the crew, and they had all courteously pointed out that they were not covered by the order the 'Joneses' were carrying, and they had all refused to give blood samples.

Jules took a deep breath. [Of course, the civilians are concentrated in certain ship's departments, and of course, in those we had put low on the priority list. If not for the ladies' 'coming out' this morning, we might not have known about this for another few days!]

Sighing, he straightened in his chair and smoothed back his ruffled hair. [I don't have a choice, so I'd better get this over with. I can still hope Ines will be so furious that she'll kill me quickly.]

Jules took another deep breath and rose, his face set as he grabbed his datapad and left the relative safety of his Medbay office.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four B

{[Part 1: Keeping up with the Joneses](#)}