

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four E - Part 1: Touched by an Angel

by [The Space Witches](#)



Gideon is not amused by what he discovers...

Chapter 1

July 2270

Angel straightened from looking into the microscope and closed her eyes, forcing back the tears that were threatening to fall, and trying to swallow the burning lump in her throat. [I will not break down and cry in the middle of Medbay,] she told herself.

Opening her eyes and breathing deeply, she looked at the time, feeling her stomach tighten when she saw that she had five minutes left of her shift. Which meant she would soon have to leave and go back to her quarters, [and be alone with my thoughts... and just plain alone.] She coughed, as the lump seemed to grow in her throat, almost choking her. Turning around self-consciously, she saw Luke Raven watching her closely. Forcing a smile, she waved at him and turned away, pretending to read something on her computer display.

Angel knew he was concerned. He'd noticed her behavior and wanted to talk about it, but she couldn't. How could she tell him that her dreams weren't the only thing upsetting her? How could she let him know that she had regressed, after making such good progress in the past few months?

She looked at the time display. Her shift was over and she sighed, not knowing whether to laugh because she could escape from Luke and his watchful eyes, or to cry because she would have to face the emptiness of her own quarters. Well, whatever, it was time to go. Unbuttoning her lab coat, she shrugged out of it and rested it over the back of her chair.

"Angel?"

She jumped at the sound of Luke's voice behind her. Swallowing convulsively, she turned around, a tight smile on her face, forcing a light tone in her voice. "Luke. Well, thank goodness our shift is over. I tell you, I'm exhausted and can't wait to fall into bed and get some sleep."

"Angel." Luke's soft voice cut her off, before she could continue and the caring in his eyes almost broke her resolve not to cry. Luke saw the distress in her face. He lifted his hand to her arm. "Please, talk to me Angel, don't bottle things up again."

Angel laughed softly and patted the hand on her arm. "I'm not bottling anything up, Luke. Really, I'm fine. Look, I know I've been a little withdrawn lately, but it's just that I'm tired, you know working these night shifts..." Her voice trailed off as Luke shook his head.

"Don't lie to me, Angel. I'm your friend remember? I know when something is upsetting you." Luke smiled sadly and lifted his free hand to brush back a strand of her hair, before he continued softly, "It's the dreams about Lucas, they've come back, haven't they?" He watched Angel flinch as her eyes filled with pain, her reaction confirming his suspicions.

Angel's heart was beating furiously in her chest, her throat felt on fire with unshed tears, and she was close to falling apart right there in Medbay. She had been a fool to think that Luke wouldn't figure out what was wrong. She looked past him to see a couple of lab technicians watching them with curiosity. Angel suddenly felt overwhelmed, trapped, and she desperately needed to get away. She pulled her arm away from Luke's hold and forced herself to sound calm as she looked up at him. "I don't want to talk about it." He reached for her arm again, looking at her with such concern that she felt like screaming.

"Angel, please..." Luke's eyes widened as she suddenly wrenched her arm away.

Angel's face flushed and tears started to trickle down her face. Luke saw pain, panic and anger flash into her eyes as she yelled at him. "I said I don't want to talk about it, damn you!" Then she rushed forward, pushing him out of the way as she fled Medbay, crying.

Luke stood staring after her, stunned by her reaction, and not sure what to do. He became aware that everyone in Medbay was watching him. Arching an eyebrow, he let his gaze go round the room, staring them down. He sighed as they turned away quickly and went back to whatever they had been doing, while he turned his attention back to where Angel had just left. He had to go after her.

His decision made, Luke turned on his heel and went into his office. He had to let Lily and John know about what had happened, to let them know he wasn't sure when he would be home. He punched in the link to their rooms and waited for one of them to answer, knowing that he would get their full support for whatever he had to do.

Angel wiped away her tears angrily. She was so tired of feeling this way. She stopped pacing, eyes closed, desperately trying not to think about Lucas and the dreams, trying not to cry again. At the sound of the door buzzer she jumped, but didn't turn around, willing whoever it was to go away, but it rang again, this time for longer. "Please, go away!"

The buzzer stopped, but this time she heard Luke's voice through the door. "Angel, please let me in."

"No! Go away, I don't want to talk!"

"I'm not leaving, Angel. Now you know I can get inside whether you open the door or not, but I'd much prefer it if you let me in yourself." His voice was gentle but firm, letting her know he was serious.

Angel turned and stared at the door for a long moment, then letting out a shaky sigh, she called softly for the door to open, and watched as Luke entered, his face gentle as he walked towards her. Her lip began to tremble, and she could feel the tears welling up inside, all resistance gone as Luke took her in his arms and held her tightly as she began to cry again.

Luke pushed Angel away after her sobs had come to an end, and led her over to the sofa, sitting down beside her. He watched as she wiped the tears from her cheeks then reached for a tissue and blew her nose. Seeing that she was more under control, he took hold of her hand.

"Are you ready to talk?" He asked softly. For a moment, she didn't look at him, and he frowned with concern. "Angel?"

Luke watched her, letting her take her time. He had hoped she was finally over Lucas, but her breakdown showed there was still progress to be made. Silently, Luke cursed the man who had hurt her. She was a beautiful, intelligent, compassionate woman who deserved to be shown real love, protected and cared for, not to be abused as Lucas had done. But she seemed to think that she didn't deserve love, even though he knew, without her saying it, that love was what she longed for and needed. ['Be there for her Luke.'] The words Lily had used when he'd spoken to her a short while before echoed softly in his head. He suddenly noticed the emphasis Lily had placed on those words. [What did you mean, Lily?]

His thoughts were brought back to the present as Angel shifted in her seat and cleared her throat. She looked nervous as if afraid to tell him what she had to say. He squeezed her hand encouragingly. "Whatever it is, Angel, tell me and I will do whatever I can to help."

Angel smiled at him sadly. "You may not like me very much or want to help, after I tell you."

Luke's brow creased into another frown. "How can you say that, Angel? How can you think I wouldn't want to help you? That you could say anything to make me care less for you."

She shook her head. "It's more than just the dreams, Luke..." Luke tightened his hold on her hand. She was clearly struggling with something. "Angel, tell me." He encouraged her again, softly. He watched as she sat unmoving for a moment, then she pulled her hand away from his and stood up to walk across the room and look out of the porthole. Finally, she turned around and cleared her throat, beginning slowly.

Angel admitted that the dreams and nightmares about Lucas had returned. They woke her every night, leaving her afraid to go back to sleep for fear of them returning. Sometimes, she had terrible nightmares where Lucas came for her, making her suffer terrible things before he killed her. Sometimes,

he came for Marcus, killing Demon and Gideon and anyone else who tried to stop him. Worst were the dreams where he loved her, where he was gentle and kind, where he was with her as she saw her sisters being with the men they loved.

"Those dreams are so hard, Luke, because..." Her voice faltered as she turned to look down at Luke, who had remained sitting, listening and never interrupting her as she talked. She dropped her gaze to the floor, her courage failing her.

Luke stood and walked over to her. Placing a finger under her chin, he lifted her head up to look at him. "Because...?"

"Luke..." Luke smiled at her gently, then led her back to the sofa. Once seated Angel continued, explaining hesitantly about the dreams. How alone they made her feel. How it was getting harder and harder to come home to face her empty quarters and that empty bed. She hesitated many times, always watching for a sign that he was disappointed with her, that he thought ill of her, but all she saw was care and encouragement, his eyes warm and friendly.

"Luke, the dreams make me miss what I don't have. They make me envy Demon and Lily. You all go to bed each night in the arms of the people you love. I come to my quarters and there's no one here to welcome me home, to take me in his arms and tell me he loves me. I see all of you together and sometimes it makes me so angry and jealous, because I want that. I want it so badly." The tears began again. Angel lifted her hands and buried her face in them, trying to rein them in. Finally, she looked at Luke again. "I envy you all so much, Luke."

Luke reached for Angel and pulled her into his arms, hugging her tightly, while he spoke soothingly to her. "That doesn't make you a bad person, Angel."

"Yes, it does. I shouldn't envy you, I shouldn't want..." Again, her voice trailed off.

Luke was silent for a moment, then he reached up to brush away a tear as it fell down her cheek. "What is it you want, Angel?" asked Luke quietly, as he cupped her face, making her look at him.

"I want... God Luke, even if just for one night, I want to feel wanted. To have someone make love to me, to feel the closeness of two people. To be able to fall asleep with someone's arms holding me. And just for once, I don't want to wake up in the morning alone. I'm a terrible person for wanting what isn't mine to have!" She let out an anguished cry and fell against him, her arms coming around his shoulders.

At a loss for words, Luke just held her body as it shook in his arms. He'd had no idea that this was what had made her so distraught, but he understood it. Angel had gone through some terrible times, and been without a partner for over a year now. It had never occurred to him that it was hurting her so much, or that she felt so alone, especially being surrounded by people who loved and cared for her. Luke now realized that this was different, and that it must have been hard all this time seeing how happy her sisters were. Until now, she had hidden it so well.

[How can I help her?] Then he remembered again what Lily had told him. *"She doesn't say it, but we know she feels alone. Help her and show her she isn't. Be there for her, Luke."* Those words echoed in his head, and suddenly, he knew what Lily had meant by them. He began to smile; there was a way for him to help Angel, and Lily had been the one to tell him. [Thank you, my love.]

Luke pushed Angel away slightly, so he could look into her eyes. "Angel, you aren't bad for wanting that, only human. You don't have to be alone. For tonight, let me give you what you need." He leaned forward and kissed her tenderly.

Luke took Angel's hand and led her into the bedroom, stopping in front of the bed that was already turned down. Taking Angel's face in his hands, he looked at her, seeing the uncertainty in her eyes. He kissed her forehead lightly, then smiled softly. "It's OK, Angel."

"But... What about...?" Angel's voice failed as she thought about how John and Lily would react if they found out. She lowered her eyes, again feeling ashamed.

Luke tightened his hold on her face and tipped her head up, until she had to look at him. "You know Lily, she's always ready to share. She wants her sisters to be happy, and she'd kill me if she found out I had a chance to help you and didn't take it. And John would help her do it." Luke's eyes were full of warmth and love as he said this, his voice carrying his affection for his lovers.

Angle smiled softly when she recognized the truth in his words, yet she was almost frightened as she realized how devoted her sister, and because of that, her partners were to her. [How did I deserve this?] She searched Luke's face for a clue. [Maybe I'm not as bad as I thought if all these good people believe in me?]

Luke lowered his mouth to cover hers in a soft kiss, slipping his tongue past her lips as they parted, teasing and touching hers as it met his. Encircling her waist, he drew her closer to him, feeling her shake. Breaking the kiss, he leaned back, without letting go of her face, to look down at her. "You're shaking."

Angel gazed up at him. "I'm a little nervous. It's been a long time since..." She laughed nervously and lifted her hands to rest lightly on his hips. She still couldn't believe this was happening.

Luke's soft voice brought her attention back to him. "I know, but don't worry, we'll take this slow. Tonight is about you, and me giving you the love and comfort you need, and deserve." Again he lowered his head, and traced his tongue along her lips, which parted invitingly. He let one hand move around her head, gently entwining his fingers in her hair, drawing her closer into the kiss, while his free hand moved to cup her breast, his thumb caressing her nipple through the fabric of her silk blouse. He could feel her nipple harden in response to his touch, and heard her soft moan of pleasure.

Angel felt herself respond immediately to Luke's tender touch, her nipples hardening and her center getting hot and wet, as she became aroused. Her body flowed against his as if of its own volition, wanting, needing the reassurance of physical contact to confirm that this was real, not just another dream that would leave her to wake up alone in her cold bed.

As Luke broke the kiss and moved back, she let her hands slip from his waist to fall to her sides, and she watched his hands move to the top button of her blouse. His eyes never left hers as he slowly began to undo the buttons. First taking hold of one wrist, then the other, he undid her cuffs, then pushed the blouse off her shoulders and down her arms, letting it fall to the floor. Next his hands moved around to unzip her skirt, then helped it slide over and down her hips, to fall in a pool around her feet.

Angel's breath caught in her throat as he looked at her naked body, then his arm came around her

waist pulling her against him, while his free hand massaged her breast, his thumb and forefinger gently rolling her nipple between them as he began kissing her again. Suddenly, she felt herself lifted in his arms and carried to the bed, where he laid her down gently, coming to sit beside her on the edge of the bed.

He traced her lips with his forefinger. "We're going to take this nice and slow, Angel. I know it's been a long time for you. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or if I hurt you in any way, you tell me to stop, OK?" He gave her one of the smiles that she had come to love so much, the kind of smile that made a person feel enveloped by it, making her feel as if she were the only person in the world.

Lifting her hand, Angel touched his cheek with the tips of her fingers and smiled. "You could never hurt me, Luke." Snaking her hand around his neck, she pulled his head down and let her tongue push its way into his mouth, kissing him deeply, hiding how overwhelmed she felt by his concern and tenderness towards her.

As their tongues intertwined, Angel moved her hands to his chest, undoing the buttons of his shirt, then helping him to get out of it. They finally came up for air, and Luke quickly took off the T-shirt he wore underneath. [He has less hair on his chest than...] Angel stopped herself from completing the thought. [No! Concentrate on the here and now.]

Luke lay down beside her, having taken off his shoes and socks, but still wearing his pants, and let his mouth wander over her throat, down to her breast, enclosing the tender bud with his lips and sucking gently, while his hand wandered down to her hips.

Angel gasped as waves of pleasure radiated from her breast throughout her body. God, she wanted this! "Luke?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

Angel had to suppress a protesting moan when he lifted his head from her breast. She had to make sure. "Are you sure? Do you really want to do this?"

For several seconds, Luke gazed at her, his face unreadable, then he took her hand and led it down his body, lightly pressing it against the bulge in his pants. "Is this answer enough?" he asked in a low voice, then gave her a naughty grin.

Angel giggled, but didn't remove her hand from his crotch, when he let go of it. Instead she lightly massaged his erection through the fabric, matching his naughty grin as he gasped and closed his eyes for a moment. "Hmm, looks like someone wants out..."

Luke sat up to remove his pants and briefs, cheering inside at Angel's infusion of humor into the situation. This was a good sign, meaning she felt at ease. When she'd asked if he was sure, his heart had gone out to her. He could see how much she wanted this, but her devotion to her sister was so strong that she'd have refused him if he'd given her any indication that Lily or John wouldn't agree with this. Luke swore to himself that he would do anything to make her happy, if only for this one night.

He stretched his body alongside hers again, leaning over her to rain feather-light kisses on her lips, her eyes, her cheeks, all of her face, then moving down her throat, along her shoulders and over her chest,

lower and lower, until he'd touched every centimeter of skin with his lips. He took his time, lingering on particularly sensitive spots, fully concentrating on her pleasure. Soon she was writhing beneath him, her breath coming in soft gasps and moans. When Luke kissed his way up her neck, Angel turned halfway around and grabbed his neck with one hand, drawing him down into a passionate kiss. After a moment of surprise, Luke moved his right hand between her thighs, finding her wet and ready as he slid a finger inside her.

Angel gasped against his mouth, suddenly letting go and looking at him, still holding him close to her face, eyes dark and face flushed with desire. "Stop teasing me!"

Luke grinned at her. "Your wish is my command." He suddenly moved forward and bit her lower lip softly, at the same time removing his finger, and rolling her onto her back. He lay above her, spreading her thighs with his knees as he positioned the head of his swollen cock at her entry, pushing into her slowly, carefully watching her reactions.

Angel gasped as Luke entered her carefully, slowly--almost too slowly, but she admonished herself to be patient--it had been a long time, after all, since she'd last had sex. But she found she soon got used to the feeling of a cock moving inside her as Luke started thrusting into her gently. "Please," she whispered, her fingernails kneading his shoulders, urging him to move faster. He did, making her moan each time he pushed inside her, sending her head spinning as he took his time to satisfy her every want and need. His hands and mouth caressed her face, her throat, her breasts, until she was shivering with seemingly never-ending pleasure, taking her close to the edge again and again. She thought she would faint with pleasure when he finally let her come.

At the height of orgasm, Angel felt a barrier breaking inside her and tears rising, a flood of tears overwhelming her, pouring out of her in loud sobs as Luke cradled her in his arms, holding her head against his chest and softly stroking her hair.

[Finally.] Luke closed his eyes in relief as all of Angel's pain and anguish made its way out of her. He lay on his side, holding her shaking body against his. "It's OK, Angel, let it out," he murmured, kissing the top of her head, holding her until she'd cried herself to sleep in his arms.

Luke felt Angel stir, as she lay curled up against him, one arm stretched across his stomach, her head using his shoulder as a pillow. He'd been awake for a while but had held her while she slept, not wanting to wake her by moving. There was another movement from Angel, and he looked down to find bleary, crystal blue eyes looking up at him, and a smile on her lips. "Good morning, Doc," her voice was thick and husky with sleep.

Luke smiled back at her and leaned forward so he could kiss her forehead, before leaning back against the headboard. "Good morning, Angel. Sleep well?"

This time Angel grinned, then stretched out her body against him like a cat, a small sound of pleasure escaping her throat, before she settled back next to him. "I can't remember when I last slept as soundly and peacefully as I did last night."

Pleased, Luke smiled. It was good that she was able to finally get some much needed rest and peace from her nightmares. He stroked her hair, "I'm happy to hear that, Angel."

He could feel her smiling against his shoulder for a moment before she shifted into a semi-sitting position, pulling the blanket up to cover herself as she looked at him, her expression serious as she whispered huskily, "I have you to thank you for that, Luke."

Luke reached up a hand and caressed her cheek. They smiled at each other again before Luke spoke, asking seriously. "Did it help?"

"Oh, Luke, more than I could ever explain in words. Somehow, I managed to get lost in the darkness, feeling that I was alone and didn't deserve love because of.... Well, no need to go into all that, but last night you showed me otherwise. You showed me that I have sisters who love me and who will always be there for me, and a friend willing to be there for me when I needed him and to show me that I will never be alone." Angel paused and Luke remained silent as he could see she had more to say.

Angel continued. "Some people may not understand how last night and making love with you could help me, but the thing about making love with someone, is that you can never feel alone or unloved. When it's with a friend, who expects nothing more from you than to let them help you, that intimacy is a lifesaver. I don't know if that makes sense?" She finished, questioningly.

Luke nodded, "It makes total sense to me, Angel." It was clear that his being there for her had helped her considerably. The darkness had been lifted, and her eyes were no longer completely haunted. Yes, there was still a lot of pain in their crystal depths--he doubted that that would ever completely go away after all she had been through--but there was less of it. Now there was a small twinkle in her eyes, an obvious sign of emotional improvement.

Luke suddenly became aware of Angel's voice calling him, and he focused his attention back on her face, only to see her watching him with concern. When she spoke, he could hear her voice tremble with uncertainty. "You don't regret what happened last night, do you, Luke?" She paused to search his face for signs of regret, then rushed on before he could reply. " You know I don't expect it to happen again, it was just this one night and I don't expect you to make love to me every time I have an emotional wobble. After today, I don't expect anything more than the friendship we already have. I know how much you love Lily and John, and I would never..."

Luke cut her off by placing his hand over her mouth, then pulling it away, he held her hand, smiling reassuringly at her.

"I will never regret being there for you, Angel, I wanted to be here, and I wouldn't have it any other way. We're friends, and that will never change!" Luke hugged Angel to him and could feel her shaking in his arms. He pulled back so that he could look into her eyes. "I don't want you to worry about it any more. OK, Angel?"

Slowly Angel smiled and nodded. They were both silent for a moment, no need to say anything more on the matter, but in the silence, Angel remembered something she needed to talk with Luke about.

"Luke?" Angel hesitated, suddenly nervous, remembering another time when the subject of possibly being pregnant had been raised.

"What is it, Angel?" asked Luke softly.

Angel smiled nervously. "I haven't had my contraceptive shot in over a year. What if... What if I..." Luke interrupted her gently.

"Don't worry, Angel, you won't get pregnant." Luke gave her a reassuring smile.

Angel sighed with relief. "At least one of us kept their shots up then."

Luke cleared his throat and murmured, "Not quite..."

Angel blinked and looked at him wide-eyed. "What do you mean? Did you and John get sterilized?"

Luke shook his head, then sighed and looked at her seriously. "Promise not to laugh?"

Angel was now totally confused, but she nodded, "Promise," [Now I'm really curious!] she thought, as Luke spoke.

"It all started with the fact that... that I don't like shots," he admitted, bashfully. "I'll suffer through them if I have to but..." He gave Angel a warning look, and she bit down on her lip to stop herself from grinning.

[Who would have thought? Dr. Raven hates shots!]

Luke eyed her for a moment, then continued, "Back in med school, I got involved with this girl. She was into eastern philosophies, and she taught me some stuff about tantrism, including techniques to prevent ejaculation when I have an orgasm. At first I thought it was nonsense, but decided to try anyway--hell, the thought of something that could spare me the annual shots..." He gave Angel a tiny grin. "And it worked."

Angel couldn't stop a giggle escaping her, then gave him a naughty grin. "I'm sure Lily and John love whatever other techniques you learned back then." Suddenly, something occurred to her and she frowned. "But then how did Lily...?"

Luke chuckled. "I got overwhelmed by one of Demon's sendings and lost control. I used the technique again after the twins were born, but a few months ago we decided to let nature take its course since we all would love to have another child, and before we knew it, Lily was pregnant again. As you know, we haven't tested to see which one of us is the father, as we want it to be a surprise." His smile clearly expressed how happy he was with Lily's pregnancy. Then a twinkle entered Luke's eyes as he said in a conspiratorial whisper, "I really should have your sister and the Captain pay for Faylinn's upbringing, since my daughter's conception was their fault."

Angel laughed and shook her head. As she did so, the clock caught her eye, and she realized how late it already was. "What am I doing? Keeping you here, while your family is waiting for you! Off with you, Luke Raven, or did you think I'd serve breakfast in bed?"

Gideon headed down the corridor, a bounce in his step as he made his way to the gym for his morning work out. As he rounded the angle of the corridor, he came to a dead halt. He moved quickly back around the corner, so he could watch unseen. Gideon's good mood evaporated instantly.

Luke Raven was hugging Angel in the doorway of her quarters.

Luke smiled at Angel gently, then his eyes turned mischievous as he looked down to where her silk gown had pulled open during their hug, to reveal a good deal of her naked breasts. Chuckling, he lifted his hands to pull it closed, tightening the sash as he spoke.

"We don't want you giving some innocent passerby a heart attack." He grinned down at her teasingly.

Angel blushed slightly, before looking up at Luke with a naughty grin. "Oh, I think they might appreciate the view."

Luke burst out laughing. "Naughty!" Angel giggled, a remarkable sound that Luke hoped he would hear more of in future. He shook his head. "You're as bad as Lily!"

Angel grinned again and made a theatrical bow. "Why, thank you, kind Sir, for that wonderful and gracious compliment," said Angel, not succeeding in smothering another naughty giggle.

Luke groaned as Angel just grinned at him, and he muttered, "Impossible!"

Both of them were completely unaware of being observed by Gideon, whose temper was rising as he watched the comfortable and teasing way in which Angel and Luke were behaving. From Angel's appearance, wearing a silk gown and with her hair all mussed up, it didn't take a genius to see that they had spent the night together.

Gideon clenched his jaw and closed his eyes for a moment, trying not to think what he was thinking. Maybe it wasn't that, but something completely innocent. Like Luke having just stopped by to talk to Angel on his way home from a night shift, but the way they were behaving... Gideon forced back the ugly feeling that welled up inside him, as he thought about the reason for them being together.

Gideon turned his attention back to the couple in the doorway, his eyes narrowing as Luke tucked a stray strand of Angel's hair behind her ear, causing Angel to smile up at the doctor. He wished he could hear what they were saying, but they weren't talking loud enough, so he had to be content with just watching what they did.

"You'd better get going, Luke, before Lily and John think I've run off with you for good," Angel said teasingly.

Luke smiled at her and hugged her, but before he could completely pull away from her, Angel cupped his face with her hands, and going on tiptoes, she kissed his mouth, gently. It was a tender kiss to show her thanks and gratitude for what he had done. She broke the kiss and gently caressed his face, his cheeks rough with morning stubble. "Thank you, Luke."

Luke nodded and smiled down at her. "My pleasure, Angel. I'm happy I could be there for you. Next time, don't go so long pretending that everything is all right when it isn't. Come and talk to me, OK?"

Angel nodded her agreement, then gently pushed Luke further out into the corridor.

"Now go home," she said grinning at him, shooing him with her hand.

Winking at her, Luke hesitated. "I'll see you in Medbay later." Angel shook her head.

"Wonderful thing about today. It's my day off," she said with a teasing grin.

Luke groaned. "Lucky witch!"

Angel nodded and grinned smugly. "Exactly, but you'll see me tonight. We're having dinner at your place, remember?"

"Of course I do."

Angel giggled. She could hear by his hesitant voice that Luke had forgotten. "Tsk ts, Doc, how could you forget?"

To her joy, Luke blushed and shook his head. "Didn't," he said quickly in denial. With that, he waved to her and turned to leave, with Angel calling after him.

"Don't work too hard, Doc." She laughed, hearing him growl at her as he disappeared around the corner. Angel stood there for a moment, then sighed contentedly. Suddenly, she had the uncomfortable feeling that she was being watched. She turned her head to the side, sure for a moment that she had seen someone there, then shook her head. "Must be imagining things."

Turning, Angel entered her quarters, already planning the nice relaxing day she would have.

As the door closed behind her, Gideon stepped out from where he had been hiding, his expression like thunder as he strode angrily towards Angel's quarters.

Angel was busy making herself a cup of herbal tea, softly singing to herself. She was feeling happy and free for the first time in months, when the buzzer of her door sounded. She smiled gently to herself, wondering what Luke had forgotten, and called for the door to open. Gideon came barging in, startling Angel into almost dropping the kettle she was holding, about to pour hot water into the teapot. She looked across the kitchen counter at him, her stomach turning over at the angry expression on his face. As much from fright as anger, her temper flared.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, barging in on me like this?" She asked as she put down the kettle and walked round the kitchen counter to approach him.

Instead of answering her question, Gideon asked one of his own, his voice cool and sarcastic. "Did you enjoy yourself last night, Angel?"

For a moment, Angel just gaped at him in astonishment. Frowning, she looked at him, trying to not feel nervous as he approached. The way he moved toward her reminded her of a leopard stalking its prey. "What are you talking about, Captain?" She forced her voice to remain strong, not giving away

the fact that she was nervous as hell.

She watched as Gideon's mouth curled into a nasty, cold smile, a smile that reminded her of... [No!] Angel shook that thought away and watched as he stopped right in front of her, folding his arms as he spoke quietly.

"Oh, you know exactly what I'm talking about, Angel." Gideon paused to look her up and down, his eyes coming to rest on her face as he continued, his tone harsh. "You and Luke!"

Angel gasped as she realized what he knew. Suddenly, she remembered the feeling she'd had that someone was watching. [Gideon!] The thought of him watching them made her blood boil, and she turned on him angrily.

"It was you, watching in the corridor, wasn't it?" She waited for him to deny it, but he just arched an eyebrow and said nothing, his silence and expression confirming her suspicion. Angel shook her head in disbelief. "Were you spying on us? How dare you! Why didn't you let us know that you were there?"

Gideon spat out his words. "Far be it from me to interrupt a romantic moment." Angel didn't miss the heavy sarcasm in his voice, and she looked at him in astonishment.

"Romantic moment? What are you talking about?"

"You and Luke!" Gideon's voice dripped acid.

Angel was slowly beginning to understand what Gideon was talking about, and what he thought he'd seen this morning. She could understand why he would have thought something romantic had happened, but that didn't give him the right to come in here and attack her about it.

"There's nothing romantic going on between me and Luke, Captain. What..." She was cut off by Gideon's loud snort of disbelief. Once again, Angel could feel her temper begin to rise as she listened to his next words.

"Didn't look that way to me."

The way Gideon said it, as if she had been doing something sordid and dirty, instead of the wonderful thing it had been last night, infuriated her. "I don't need to explain anything to you, Captain!"

Angel turned away, letting him know that there was nothing left to say, hoping that ignoring him would make him leave. Instead, she felt her arm grabbed, and she was spun around. Her stomach lurched at the anger she saw in Gideon's eyes.

"Don't you dare turn your back on me, Angel!" Gideon yelled in her face.

Angel yanked her arm free, and she yelled back at him. "And don't you dare touch me!"

Gideon gave a dry laugh and folded his arms again. "Oh, right, you probably only want Luke to touch you these days!"

Angel was confused. She didn't understand what was making Gideon behave like this. He was obviously trying to get at something, and she wished he would get to the point. Sighing, she asked in exasperation, "What's that supposed to mean?"

Gideon ignored her question. He approached her again, standing very close, forcing her to look up at him. He leaned forward, until he could whisper against her ear. "I won't let you do it."

Angel's head snapped back, and she looked up at him in confusion. "Do what?"

Gideon spoke quietly and directly, never taking his eyes off her. "Steal Luke away from Lily and John. I won't let you get up to your old tricks."

For a moment, Angel couldn't believe what Gideon had said. How could he think that? She had come a long way, and she had thought that the Captain knew that, yet he was accusing her of something horrible. Throwing all her hurt and anger at him, she screamed. "You utter bastard! How dare you! What you saw was..."

Gideon cut her off harshly. "Was what Angel? Don't try and lie to me, I know exactly what it was!"

"You don't understand! Luke was just comforting me last night..." Again, before she could even complete a sentence, Gideon cut her off with a snort and a dry disbelieving laugh.

"Oh, so that's what it was, *comforting*."

Reining in her temper, Angel nodded. "Yes. Luke was comforting me, sharing himself with me so that I wouldn't feel so alone. Showing me that I was loved. It was just one night, nothing more and I was certainly not trying to steal him away from Lily and John. I'd never do that!"

Gideon was silent for a moment. "You really expect me to believe that?"

Angel let out a small wail of frustration. "Yes! Because it's the truth, damn you!" Too upset, and wanting to make him understand, she couldn't stop what she said next. "It's no different than how it was with you and Lily. One time only, two people being there for each other, to take away the loneliness." Angel was instantly appalled that she had lost control and revealed that she knew about him and Lily. It brought back the jealousy that had clutched at her stomach, when she had seen them together making love, wishing it had been her with Gideon. She had intended to keep that knowledge to herself. Yet in a moment of anger she had thrown it at him, and she could see by his sharp intake of breath that she had scored a hit.

Gideon was taken aback for a moment. "How do you know about that?" His anger returned in full force, and he turned on her again before she could respond. "You were spying on me with that damned ball of sight of yours!" He shouted, not giving Angel a chance to speak as he ranted on. "Did it give you a thrill to watch?" Gideon laughed coldly before continuing, "Probably drove you nuts because it wasn't you I was fucking, didn't it?"

Angel gasped at how close to the truth he had come. "You bastard! I won't dignify that with an answer, and I won't let you turn anything else on me! What happened between me and Luke is no different than you and Lily, and was for virtually the same reason!"

Gideon let out a loud snort, a sound that made Angel want to hit him. "Oh, I doubt it, Angel!"

"Why should it be different? Tell me, Captain."

Gideon looked her squarely in the eyes and said softly. "The difference is between you and Lily,

sweetheart!"

Angel felt like screaming. "Different how?"

Gideon's face was cruel as he spoke. "Well, Lily didn't have to tie me down, to get me to make love to her. I guess we'd better check Luke for rope burns."

Angel's fist launched itself at his face and hit Gideon full force on the mouth. Channeling all her telekinetic ability into her arm, she lashed out at him, punching him in the face so hard that it sent him flying backwards, knocking him unconscious.

She stood there, unable to move for a moment as she looked at Gideon, at his bleeding split lip, then she lifted her hand and looked at it. Despite how hard Angel had hit him, it didn't hurt, and there wasn't a mark on her knuckles to indicate that she had just punched out a man much bigger than herself. [Incredible,] she thought inanely. Then suddenly, she realized what she had done, and instantly her anger dissipated. She felt remorse for losing her temper, for having used her telekinetic ability to reinforce her hand and strengthen her punch. She could have seriously hurt him.

Angel let out a distressed cry and ran to the sofa. She climbed on it, half lying on top of Gideon. "Oh God, Matthew, please be all right!" She touched his face, gently, hoping that the stimulus would bring him round. There wasn't even a flicker from his eyes.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you." Angel caressed his face, brushing away a lock of hair that had fallen across his forehead. She trailed her fingers along his jaw, which was beginning to discolor, finally touching a finger to where his lip had split, wiping away the small trickle of blood as it worked its way down his chin. All the anger she had felt was gone as she looked at his unconscious face, feeling nothing but love for him and regret for hurting him, wanting him to wake up.

"Matthew, please wake up!" There was no response. Without thinking, she leaned forward, placing her free hand on his chest for support, her finger gently stroking his cut lip. She lowered her head and tentatively flicked out her tongue, gently licking at the wound, cleaning away the blood. Moving her head back slightly, she licked her lips, the strong taste of blood in her mouth.

Angel looked at him for signs of waking. "Matt?" Still nothing. Maybe it was wrong of her to take advantage like this, but she couldn't stop herself.

Angel leaned forward and slowly placed her lips over his, gently kissing him, wishing that he were able to respond, so she could really taste the warm haven of his mouth. Gideon's mouth opened, and she felt his tongue slowly, sensually enter her mouth. She pulled back for just a moment to whisper "I'm sorry," then let her tongue entwine with his, drinking in the spicy taste that was so familiar to her. Angel was vaguely aware of an arm coming around her waist, pulling her tightly against Gideon's chest as the kiss became more passionate, then she felt herself moving, being turned over as he pinned her beneath him on the sofa.

As he lifted back to consciousness, Gideon was aware of something soft and warm caressing his lips. Still dazed, he began to respond to the soft mouth on his. He let his tongue wander out to meet the tongue gently flicking against the corner of his mouth, soothing away the pain, then he let his tongue slip into the warmth, savoring the familiar taste of honey he remembered so well. He began to deepen the kiss, pushing his tongue further into Angel's mouth. He lifted his arms and folded them around her

slim waist, pulling her against him.

For a moment, the kiss was broken and Gideon heard Angel whisper against his mouth, "I'm sorry," before their mouths meshed together. Maybe he was still confused and dazed after being hit, but he couldn't stop himself as he held her against him, kissing her passionately as he turned her over, so that she was lying beneath him. There was no thinking now, just feeling and the need to have her.

Gideon pulled his arms free, to allow his hands to move down her body. Slipping a hand underneath the hem of her gown, he began to caress her leg, his hand moving higher along her silken thigh, his tongue continuing to flick and entwine with hers. Angel moaned against him, and he felt her hips rubbing against his growing erection. Suddenly, rational thought returned and Gideon became fully aware of what was happening. He broke the kiss, pulling away from Angel to sit up straight on the sofa, his breathing ragged as he shook his head.

Angel sat up, looking at Gideon. He could see that she was hurt and confused by his breaking away. Her voice was soft and unsure as she reached out a hand to him, calling his name. "Matthew?"

Gideon heard her voice, so soft and unsure. So easy for him to just take her back in his arms again and kiss her and... "We can't!"

Angel jumped slightly at his tone and looked at him in confusion. "Why?" She asked softly.

Gideon said nothing as he touched a finger to his split lip, before he spoke. "Because it's wrong." He stood up slowly and moved away from the sofa, his back to Angel.

Her voice was thick with the threat of tears as she asked him quietly, "Why do you want to keep hurting me, Matt?"

Gideon jerked in surprise at her question and turned to look at her. He regretted seeing pain in her eyes, pain that, as usual, he had caused. He looked at her gently and walked toward her. "I don't want to hurt you, Angel." [Yeah right, Matt, but you keep doing it.]

Angel looked at him sadly. "Then why, if you were so lonely, couldn't you have come to me? Why did it have to be Lily?"

Gideon remained silent as he thought about the reason why he pushed her away, why he did everything in his power to stay away from her. It wasn't something he could or would admit easily. Instead of answering her question directly, he decided to reflect her question back, "Why Luke?"

"Because he's my friend, and he was willing to be there for me when I needed him."

He heard her words and was surprised that he actually felt hurt by them. When it came to Angel, although it was dangerous wanting her, he still did, and the thought of her with another man... Gideon suddenly realized why he was so angry with Angel, angry at the thought of her with Luke. Gideon was *jealous*. He was attacking Angel out of jealousy. He was no longer able to deny his envy that Luke had been there for Angel. [That should have been me!] It was true. If any one should have shown Angel that she wasn't alone and that she was loved, it should have been him.

"Why Lily?" Angel's words pierced Gideon's introspection and brought his attention back to her. Her hair was disheveled, her lips swollen where they'd been pressed against his, her robe falling apart to reveal more of her breasts than he could bear the sight of at that moment. The look of pain in Angel's

crystal blue eyes nearly broke his resolve.

She let out a startled cry as Gideon suddenly grabbed her, cutting off her cry as he claimed her mouth in a bruising kiss, his arms pulling her roughly against him. Then he let her go abruptly, leaving her gasping for breath, looking at him in shock as he all but shouted at her. "You want to know why Lily and not you? Because I know damned well that if I make love to you once, I'll never be able to stop! And I love Deborah too much to do that to her!"

They stared at each other in stunned silence.

At first, Angel felt overjoyed at what Gideon had just admitted to her, that he wanted her. Then, as she played over his words, anger began to set in. Gideon had told her that he wanted her, then in the very next instant, told her that nothing would ever happen between them. It was as if he had offered her a drink of water in the middle of the desert and then snatched it away from her. She knew now that he had come in here, attacking her, accusing her of trying to steal Luke, out of jealousy. Gideon wanted her, but would do nothing about it, yet he was angry because she had found comfort with Luke for one night. Any joy she had felt disappeared, and she lashed out at him in anger. "You cruel bastard!"

Gideon tried to soothe her, to explain. He put his hands on her shoulders and spoke gently. "Angel..."

Angel was having none of it, and she pushed him away. "So that's what accusing me of stealing Luke was all about, was it? Jealousy?" She watched as Gideon lowered his gaze, avoiding her eyes. "How dare you hurt me like this? Just because you're jealous and have no idea how to deal with your feelings! How dare you!"

Gideon took in a deep breath and held up his hands cutting her off. "Angel, I'm sorry. I was wrong. I know..."

Angel was too angry to listen. "You're sorry? I've come a long way, Captain. I've been to hell and back, and it changed me for the better. Whatever reasons you had for accusing me of trying to take Luke away from Lily and John, you had no right. You have even less right to tell me that in your own fucked up way, you want me, then in the same breath, tell me that it will never happen! I am all too aware of that fact, and I don't need you to remind me!"

Gideon watched as she went silent, her chest heaving with anger. He opened his mouth to speak, but Angel cut him off abruptly, raising her arm and pointing to the door as she told him, coldly, "Get out."

Gideon didn't move. "Angel, please, let's talk about this."

Angel shook her head and pointed at the door again, this time yelling at him. "GET OUT NOW!!!"

Still Gideon didn't budge. She whipped her head around and glared at him, her blue eyes almost transparent as they blazed with anger, but she kept her voice calm as she spoke. "You can get out on your own two feet, or I can help you leave." She paused to stare pointedly at his split lip. "And believe me, Captain, that will be extremely painful." Her voice was a low threat.

Sighing, Gideon nodded and headed towards the door, feeling Angel's eyes boring into him. As the door opened, he turned to look back at her. "We're going to finish talking about this, Angel." He watched as she blinked in response, and then turned her gaze from him. Gideon shook his head and turned to walk out of the door.

As he exited into the corridor, Angel's voice stopped him. "Captain?" Gideon turned just in time to find her throwing something at him. If his reflexes hadn't been good, it would have hit him painfully in the head, adding to the injury she'd already inflicted on him. He looked at what he'd caught and found himself holding a small regenerator. Gideon looked up at her.

"Better heal that split lip. You wouldn't want someone to see it and ask for an explanation of how you got it. Might be awkward." Her tone was acid, and Gideon didn't miss the hidden threat in her voice. The "someone" she was talking about was Deborah. He felt his hackles rise, and he was tempted to throw the regenerator right back at her. Gideon clenched his jaw and reined in his temper, deciding that they both needed time and space to cool down, before they could resolve the issues that stood between them. He looked at Angel, who arched an eyebrow at him and gave him a cold smile, then turned her back on him, ordering the door to close.

Gideon stood in the middle of the corridor and watched the door shut, his last view of Angel was her back as she walked away towards her bedroom. He took a deep breath before continuing towards the gym. [This isn't over yet, Angel.]

Gideon stood outside the door to his quarters, bracing himself to enter. He'd spent the day trying to work off the anger he'd carried around after his confrontation with Angel, first in the gym, then at his job. He couldn't help but smile as he thought about the battle drills that he'd called that afternoon.

He'd set up G'Tan, the leader of the Narn Marines, with nine of his best troops, to act as an invasion force on the Excalibur. Then Gideon had gone out and led the troops trying to stop them, and just to make it more interesting, he'd had all the bullet cars shut down.

G'Tan had done exactly as Gideon had expected and headed straight for the bullet car tubes, the fastest means of access around the ship. The Captain had taken his troops into the tubes, intending to set up a defensive position to prevent G'Tan and his Narns getting back out into the main parts of the ship. Before he could get his team in place, G'Tan had arrived, with four other Narns, and wiped Gideon and his defensive team out. The problem was that Gideon and his people had been laughing so much, they'd been completely unable to fight and had no alternative but to surrender.

The sight of five fully armed Narns balancing around and on top of Deborah's motorbike, had reduced the defensive team to near hysterical mirth. Apparently, the Narns had found the bike when they'd entered the tube and had decided to use it to surprise the defense force that they guessed would be waiting for them.

Gideon smiled as he stood in the corridor. In future, he wouldn't leave the keys in the ignition, but he still couldn't figure out how five of the Narn had managed to ride the damned thing. The Captain had got his revenge by telling G'Tan that if there was a single scratch on the bike anywhere, he'd have to answer to Deborah. The flash of fear that had showed in the Narn's red eyes at that moment had been worth the surrender. Since Deborah had started working out with the Marines, they'd learned to respect her strength and speed. Maybe if Gideon could hold onto the memory of that event, he could hold onto the good humor it had produced.

The Captain took a deep breath and called for the door to open. The living area was empty, but he could hear Marcus crying from his bedroom. Walking through, he found Deborah pacing the floor with Marcus in her arms, as she tried to soothe the crying child. Gideon walked over and held out his arms. Deborah smiled, kissed him quickly on the cheek and handed over their son. Gideon rocked the baby gently and asked, "What's the matter with him?"

Deborah nodded to the blue ring that Marcus held clamped tightly in his mouth. "Another couple of teeth coming through. He's not very happy about it, but he'll survive. The teething ring that Galen gave us certainly helps. Just give it a few minutes to kick in and he'll be fine." She reached up to stroke the baby's head as he cried against his father's shoulder. "If you're going to hold him for a bit, I'll go get dinner. Any preferences?"

Gideon shook his head. "Not hungry." He held out Marcus and handed him back to his mother. "I need to get some work done, so if it's nothing serious, you take care of him, will you?"

Deborah took the baby back and frowned at her husband. "I can do that. Matthew, are you OK? You feel... angry about something."

Gideon took a deep breath. "What makes me angry is when I don't get any privacy. Just leave me and my feelings alone for once, and take care of Marcus." He left the bedroom abruptly and went to sit at his desk in the adjoining room, calling up a series of supply requisitions that he'd been meaning to deal with for days. He was even angrier now. Angry with himself for turning on Deborah, angry with Deborah for her comment, but mostly still angry with Angel for what had happened that morning. Gideon half expected Deborah to follow him and pursue the issue, but she didn't. Pretending to read the requisitions, he was aware of Marcus' cries gradually quieting in the bedroom, then Deborah leaving through the connecting doors to her quarters, obviously taking her husband at his word and leaving him alone.

The Captain sat trying to get through the requisitions for nearly an hour, before he realized that he was achieving nothing. He was sitting, listening, waiting for Deborah to come to him, but she didn't. Gideon threw the data pad down onto the desk and stood. [Enough!] He went through to Deborah's quarters and saw that she was curled up on the sofa, a book in her hand. Her hair had fallen forward, so he couldn't see her face as she read. He stood silently in the doorway for a moment, looking at his wife, cursing himself for an idiot. Deborah was beautiful, kind, intelligent, funny, everything he could ever want in a woman, and he loved her passionately. So why wasn't it enough? Why did he want to make love to her sister? Gideon stopped and half laughed to himself. Deborah would be damned near perfect if it weren't for the fact that she had a seriously bad temper at times, was downright grouchy if she didn't get enough sleep and she hogged the sheets.

He leaned against the doorframe, his arms crossed, while he thought about what to say. Deborah didn't seem to have noticed him, so he cleared his throat, and said, "I'm sorry." It was the only thing he could think of.

Deborah shook her head, but kept looking at her book, her hair still concealing her face. "No, I'm sorry. You're right, I shouldn't use my ability to read your feelings. You should have some privacy." Her voice was low and tight.

Gideon moved across the room and knelt by the sofa, pushing Deborah's hair back to look into her face. Her eyes and nose were red, and he realized that he'd made her cry. He lifted his hand to wipe the tear tracks from her face and whispered again, "I'm sorry. It's not about you, and I shouldn't have

said that." He tried to smile as he said, "I just had a lousy day."

Deborah leaned forward and kissed him. "Well, I'm sorry about that, too. What happened?"

Gideon stood, then nudged her aside, sitting on the sofa before taking her into his arms. This gave him the time to think of answer to her question, or it should have done. By the time he had them both comfortably settled, the Captain still hadn't thought of a suitable response. A lie was out of the question, she'd spot it at once, so it had to be some version of the truth. Taking a deep breath he plunged in. "Angel and I had a falling out this morning."

Deborah's head came up quickly and she turned to stare at him. "Oh Matthew, I'm sorry. What was it about this time?"

Kissing her gently on the forehead, Gideon whispered, "It's not important. I'll go see her tomorrow, and we'll straighten things out. Now, let's go to bed." It was only 20:00, but this was the one way he could be sure to distract his wife.

"You haven't had dinner yet. Let me get you something, I like you lean and keen, not skinny, you know." Deborah's smile was mischievous as she ran her hand over Gideon's stomach.

He laughed, grabbing her hand and kissing it. "I'll eat later. Right now I want to show you that I love you. You do know that, don't you?"

Deborah smiled sadly. "Well, I do if I snoop, but I'll try to stop doing that."

Gideon hugged his wife tightly. "You keep right on snooping. That way, you'll always know just how much I care." He pushed her gently away from him, watching as she swung her feet to the floor and stood, then pulled himself up to stand by her. He stooped suddenly and pushed his arms beneath her knees and her back, sweeping her into the air.

Deborah let out a small shriek of surprise, then quickly put her arms around his neck. Gideon could feel the strain on his back and legs. Deborah wasn't exactly a featherweight. Carrying her into the bedroom, he lowered her gently to the bed then leaned forward and started to unbutton her shirt. Maybe if he spent the night making love to Deborah, he could forget how much he wanted to do the same with Angel.

Angel rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. She'd been awake since 05:00 and had been lying in her bed for the past hour, willing herself to get up, but she was feeling lazy. Besides, it wasn't like she had to get up to go to work. She was working another night shift, so had the rest of the day off until she had to go to Medbay.

Angel sighed as her thoughts went back to the previous day. She closed her eyes and clamped down on the anger she was still feeling about Gideon's admission about his feelings towards her. Those feelings had almost prevented her going to Lily's for dinner.

But she had gone to dinner, behaving as if there was nothing wrong. She couldn't let Luke see her upset, he'd have asked her what was wrong, and she wouldn't have been able to lie to him. There was no way she could tell him about her fight with Gideon, especially not the part about him accusing her of trying to steal Luke from Lily and John. The last thing she needed was to cause a falling out

between the two men.

To her surprise, dinner had actually help take her mind off the whole ugly mess with the Captain.

She and Lily had sat in the lounge talking, while Luke and John finished getting dinner ready. Well, actually, John was the chef, Luke was just assisting. Thank the gods, as it was a known fact that Luke wasn't the best of cooks, but he made one hell of a good chef's assistant.

"Is everything OK now, Angel?" Lily asked softly.

Angel smiled at her sister. "Yes..." She hesitated a moment before going on, taking hold of her sister's hand and squeezing it gently. "Thank you, Lily, for..." Again she faltered. What words could she use to thank Lily for letting her share Luke?

Lily must have seen her struggling, as she smiled and placed her free hand over Angel's. "It was John's and my pleasure, Angel, to share Luke with you. We'd do anything to help you."

Lily's voice was so honest and sincere that all Angel could do was give her sister a hug, whispering against her ear. "It did help, Lily, more than you could ever know." Angel held her sister for a moment longer then pulled back to give her a smile.

Lily nodded in silent understanding, and then a small frown crossed her brow. "What is it, Lily?" Angel asked, with concern.

Lily let out a small sad sigh. "I just wish you could have come to me, or Demon, and let us know what was upsetting you so much. Luke seems to have helped, but I wish you were able to explain what it was all about." Her voice was softly questioning, and Angel could hear an undertone of hurt.

She could understand it, and she regretted hurting her sister by not being able to confide in her. It had been hard to tell Luke what had been wrong; it felt impossible to explain it to her sisters.

"I'm sorry, Lily, I know how it must hurt you, but I promise one day I will explain. Just not yet. I hope you can understand that?" Angel asked gently.

Lily was silent for a moment, then smiled. "I can understand that, more especially now that I know that whatever was wrong, Luke has helped you with it."

Angel couldn't prevent a warm heat rushing to her face. Lily noticed and chuckled naughtily. "He's incredible, isn't he?"

Lily's naughty tone took Angel a little by surprise. Not so much the fact that she had a naughty mind--she and Lily had often had conversations about men before--it was just a little different when it involved her sister's lover.

Angel let out a nervous laugh. "Umm, yes, he is." Lily laughed in response to her sister's blush.

"No need to blush, Angel, I have no problem talking about what a slut Luke can be."

At first, Angel was taken aback by her sister's comment, but the seeing the mischievous sparkle in

Lily's green eyes, she knew what Lily was doing. It was her way of telling Angel that there was no jealousy on her part.

Angel recovered from her surprise, and returned Lily's naughty grin. "You know, you will have to give him a talking to, he can't go around sleeping with every woman in need. He'll get a reputation."

Lily was just about to respond when Luke appeared, carrying a bowl of salad. He smiled across at them as he placed it on the dining table. Lily and Angel looked at each other and through their link Lily said, [[Speak of the devil.]] It took an enormous effort for Angel to smother the laughter she felt welling up.

They smiled back at Luke as he asked them curiously. "What are you two ladies talking about?"

Angel and Lily looked at each other conspiratorially, then turned to grin at Luke, saying in unison, "Oh, you know, girl talk." Angel watched with amusement as Luke looked at them for a moment. It was clear from his suspicious expression that he wasn't buying it. Shaking his head, he smiled at them, then turned and went back into the kitchen, muttering under his breath something about sisters and witches, and them all being impossible.

Once he was out of earshot, Lily and Angel collapsed back on the sofa with mirth. Finally, Angel managed to stop laughing and said breathlessly, "Shame on us for doing that to him."

Lily laughed again, then sat up straight, wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes as she spoke. "He's a big boy; he can handle it."

Angel grinned at Lily. "Yes, he certainly is a 'big' boy." At her words, Lily let out a burst of dirty laughter, echoed seconds later by Angel.

Finally, they both managed to stop laughing and Lily cleared her throat, suddenly a little more serious. "You know, we can tease about Luke, but the truth is that he knows what can heal a person. In his own special way, Luke knows that sometimes using his body and his heart is the best way to help someone."

Angel watched Lily, and she could see the utter love and devotion in her sister's face as she spoke. She replied softly. "He's a true healer, and a good man. You and John are very lucky to have him."

Lily smiled back at Angel. "We're all lucky to have him in our lives, Angel."

No one could have agreed more with Lily than Angel. "I don't know what I would do without his friendship."

"You'll never have to find that out, Angel," said Lily with complete conviction.

Before Angel could respond, John's voice interrupted her as he came out of the kitchen and walked past them to the dining table. "Dinner is served, ladies."

Their serious mood changed once again, as they stood and went over to the dining table, where Luke and John had placed a veritable feast for them. Angel surveyed the table, then looked up at John, grinning. "This looks incredible, John."

Lily walked around to where John stood and put her arm around his waist. "I got lucky when I got

this one. Best cook in Earthforce."

John grinned down at her and said teasingly. "You only stay with me because of the food."

Without missing a beat, Lily nodded. "A girl has to get a good meal somehow."

Lily squealed as John grabbed her tight against him. "Careful wench, you talk like that and we won't give you dessert later, will we Luke?" John grinned across at Luke, who was now standing beside Angel.

He frowned in mock concentration. "I think we'll have to punish our Fire-Lily instead." Angel laughed at the teasing going back and forth.

Lily pouted at Luke, then broke into a naughty grin. "Oh, I don't mind being punished at all."

John shook his head and looked at Angel. "See what we have to put up with?"

Angel laughed and grinned at him. "And you love every moment of it." She paused as he returned her grin, then she looked at the table. "Now if you three can behave, maybe we could get stuck into this feast. I'm starved."

There was a chorus of agreement. John pulled out Lily's seat, while Luke did the same for Angel. With Luke seated beside Angel, and John beside Lily, the rest of the evening went on, with a good meal and light-hearted conversation.

Angel smiled at the memory of the dinner. She'd had so much fun. Not once had her thoughts strayed to anything to do with her fight with Gideon. The evening spent with Lily and her men had been good for her soul, and she had left them feeling well fed and wonderfully happy.

Angel's smile disappeared, and she whispered to herself. "If only that could have lasted." But no such luck. Moving suddenly, Angel got out of bed. Pulling on her robe, she went into the bathroom. [Maybe a shower will clear my thoughts.]

Half an hour later, Angel stood in front of her closet. The vibe shower hadn't helped. She'd only ended up thinking about Gideon, in particular something he'd said to her before he had left. "*We're going to finish talking about this, Angel.*"

Angel pursed her lips. [Not if I have anything to say about it, Captain.] But she doubted that Gideon would give up that easily. Then again after her last words to him, he might just be pissed off enough to stay clear of her. [Yeah, and pigs can fly.]

Absently, Angel picked out an outfit and put it on. Once dressed, she walked through to the living room and sat down on the sofa. Running her hands through her hair, she tried to ignore her inner voice as it told her that she wouldn't be able to run from her problems with Gideon. Angel shook her head, trying to chase her inner voice away, trying to deny the truth it spoke. But she couldn't.

She knew it was right, but she was afraid. Gideon's admission of his feelings--or rather attraction--for her was overwhelming. Knowing how he felt, and that he wouldn't do anything about those feelings, was unbearable. She wished to the gods that he'd never told her. [Damn him!]

The whole situation was one gigantic mess and she didn't know how to deal with it. Angel closed her eyes and groaned. She knew the answer to that, but for now she decided to take Scarlett O'Hara's way out. "I'll think about it tomorrow." For now, she was just going to do her best to avoid Gideon, and hoped that he felt the same way.

The sound of the door buzzer made Angel sit bolt upright. Her heart was pounding in her chest as she stared at the door, hardly breathing, knowing in her soul who it was, and she was suddenly nervous. Swallowing, she sat dead still. There was no way she was going to open that door. She was just going to sit there and wait, hoping that Gideon would get the message and leave.

For a moment, she feared that he'd use his Captain's override code on her door. But then she relaxed slightly; Gideon wouldn't abuse his power like that unless it was an absolute emergency. [No emergency here, Captain, so go AWAY,] willed Angel, silently.

She jumped when the buzzer sounded again, this time for longer, as Gideon obviously kept his finger on it. [Damn you! Go away!] It kept on for a moment longer, and then once again her quarters returned to silence. Angel shifted to the edge of the sofa, waiting tensely. Nothing. She was about to let out a sigh of relief, believing that Gideon had given up, when she heard his muffled voice through the door.

"I know you're there, Angel. I'm not leaving, until we talk." Angel ground her teeth. She should have known that Gideon wouldn't give up that easily. [Stubborn bastard!] Well, she could be just as stubborn as he was, and she had no intention of talking to him right now. [You have to!] Her inner voice piped up, forcefully.

"Oh, shut up!" Angel hissed at it, under her breath.

"Angel, I'm not going away!" She heard his impatience, and felt her own irritation rising. Standing up, she moved a little closer to the door, so Gideon would be able to hear her.

"Go away, Captain, I have nothing to say to you!" For a moment, there was no response, but then Gideon's voice sounded through the door again.

"Please, Angel let me in. We have to talk about what happened yesterday. You know that."

Angel stood dead still, eyes closed, for a long time. Finally, her eyes opened. [Might as well get this over with.] Her voice was just above a whisper as she instructed the door to open.

Gideon walked into Angel's quarters slowly. She said nothing, just stood watching him. The look in her eyes sliced through him; she was looking at him as if he were the devil himself. He cursed himself for what had happened the day before. He knew he had hurt her in so many ways and was ashamed. When it came to hurting Angel, he was no better than Lucas.

When she spoke, her voice was cold. "You're wasting your time, Captain. I have nothing to say to you." Angel paused, then frowned, as if something had come to mind. "No wait, that's not true. I do have something to say to you. I think it's best that after today, we try to stay clear of each other."

"NO!" Gideon instantly regretted the harshness of his tone, as Angel jumped and backed away from

him. He hadn't intended to sound angry, but he couldn't let Angel go on about avoiding each other. Things would be far worse, if they didn't deal with the issues that lay between them.

"I'm sorry, Angel. I didn't mean to yell." He watched her face for a moment, and could see that she was both angry and afraid. He didn't mind the anger, she had a right to that, but he felt guilty about making her afraid. [Not that she should be, she could beat the shit out of me if she put her mind to it. Literally!]

He went on, gently. "We can't avoid each other, Angel. That won't make the problems we have go away. We have to talk and try and come to some kind of..." Gideon struggled for the right words.

"Some kind of what, Captain?" Gideon winced at the coldness in her tone.

He sighed. "I don't know what, exactly, Angel. All I know is that something happened yesterday, and we have to deal with it."

Angel stood watching Gideon. Something about the tone of his voice, and the look of sincerity in his eyes, started to make her rethink. They did have to talk. She realized that it was the only way she'd be able to stay on board the Excalibur, seeing him every day.

Slowly, she moved over to the sofa, then looking up at Gideon, she nodded and said softly, "You're right, Matt, we do have to talk." Indicating the chair opposite her, she waited as Gideon took a seat, before she asked. "So. Who goes first?"

She watched as Gideon gave her a wry smile. "I know it's usually 'ladies first' but if you don't mind, I'll start." Angel nodded.

Gideon leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees as he began. "First, I want to say I'm sorry for yesterday, Angel. You were right, I had no right to accuse you."

Gideon paused, closing his eyes for a moment. Angel could see the regret etched in his face, and she could hear the guilt in his voice as he continued. "The remark I made about checking Luke for rope burns, was a cruel, vicious thing to say. I won't lie, Angel, I wanted to hurt you, and I'm sorry for that. The only excuse I have to offer is that I did it out of jealousy. Not that it makes it right or excuses my actions, but I'm sorry. Can you forgive me, Angel?"

He looked and sounded so earnest, his deep voice gentle, and his hazel eyes filled with warmth. Finally, she nodded, her voice soft and sure as she spoke. "Yes, I can forgive you. But how do we stop it from happening again, Matt?"

Gideon sighed, and sat back in the chair. This was as hard for him as it was for her. "There's only one way, Angel."

"How?" asked Angel, hesitantly. Suddenly she was afraid that he was going to tell her that maybe the best thing was for her to leave the Excalibur. There were so many reasons she couldn't leave, her link to her sisters, and the thought of not seeing him every day was impossible to consider. Angel's stomach lurched nervously as Gideon stood up and came over to the sofa, his expression serious as he took a seat beside her, turning slightly so he could look at her. Apprehensively, Angel turned her head to face him.

Gideon smiled at her gently, and she relaxed slightly. "The only way is for us to once and for all deal with our attraction to each other."

Angel felt a nervous bubble of laughter well up, but she suppressed it quickly. She cleared her throat, before she responded, "You make that sound as if it's the easiest thing to do."

Gideon gave her a small smile. "It won't be easy, but I know there's one good reason that both of us will try to make it work." He paused, then looked at her gently as he said one word. "Deborah."

Angel tried not to let the mention of her sister's name strike a chord of hurt inside her. Struggling to keep her emotions calm, she looked at Gideon, knowing he had more to explain. "Go on." Angel encouraged softly.

Gideon's voice was gentle as he started to explain, knowing what he would have to say would hurt Angel, even if by the end of it she agreed, as he suspected she would. "We have a lot of differences, Angel, and we've hurt each other because of them. But we do have one very important thing in common. Our love for Deborah and a mutual desire not to do anything to hurt her."

He came to a stop, so he could watch Angel for a moment. Gideon wished she would look at him, but he guessed that for the moment it was hard enough for her to hear this.

He went on. "You have no idea how I wish that things could be different. That Deborah, you and I could be like Lily, John and Luke, able to share each other the way they do. That we could be together at times, without guilt or fear of one of us getting hurt..." He paused as finally Angel moved, turning her head slightly to watch him, the look in her eyes cutting at his heart. They reflected a look of hopelessness, as she too knew that it would never be possible. He went on slowly, careful to be as gentle as possible with his words.

"But I think we both know that wouldn't be possible. Unlike Lily, John and Luke, we're possessive people. When we're with someone, we want to be the only person for them. I'm married to your sister, Angel. She gave me a child, and I truly love her with all my heart..." He paused as he saw Angel take in a shaky breath. He knew hearing those words must hurt her, but he continued. "That doesn't stop me from wanting you, but I've made a commitment to Deborah. It would be unforgivable of me to betray that."

It was hard for him to admit all this; he could only imagine how hard it was for Angel to hear it. He knew her feelings for him were strong, what he was telling her had to hurt. Despite his attraction to her, he wouldn't betray Deborah's love and trust in him.

There was a long silence, and Gideon began to wonder if Angel was ever going to say something in response. Then she opened her eyes, and finally looked at him. Her eyes glistening with the threat of tears and her voice was strained, but he could hear how brave she was trying to be as finally, she spoke.

"You're right, Matt. I don't want Demon hurt. As much as I want you, I want even more to protect her from having her heart broken." She sat up straight and took in a deep shaky breath. "And the only way to never hurt her, is to never give in to what we feel."

Gideon couldn't have admired her more than he did at that moment. "I'm glad that you agree." He smiled at her. "But then it doesn't surprise me. Knowing how much you love Deborah."

Angel smiled weakly back at him. "But..." Angel faltered.

"But what?" Gideon's voice was softly encouraging.

"But where do we go from here? We're both in agreement on not giving into our attraction and not hurting Demon. But where does that leave us? What kind of 'relationship' do we have?"

Gideon's silence gave Angel time to get her emotions under control. Her heart was still hurting from what Gideon had admitted about Demon. She knew he loved her sister, but hearing him say the words, and seeing how much he meant them, had wounded her deeply.

She was in turmoil from knowing that she had to give up the hope that one day she and Gideon could be together. She had to deny her own heart what it wanted so badly, but she reluctantly admired Gideon nevertheless. Many men wouldn't think twice about cheating on their wives.

Gideon raised his head to look at her, bringing her attention back from her inner thoughts. Angel listened with growing surprise and hope at what he went on to say. He looked at her seriously, but his eyes were gentle as they held hers. "I know that this is a lot to ask of you, Angel, but do you think we can work together on turning our attraction for each other into friendship? Can we take what we have and turn it into something better? Something that won't hurt Deborah and Marcus?"

Angel was taken aback, she'd never considered it possible that she and Gideon could be friends. They had once talked about it, but somehow that had never happened. But now, it seemed the only way forward. Angel knew it wouldn't be easy. There was a lot of history between them, a lot of hurt and guilt, but maybe as friends they could learn to get over it and let the wounds heal.

"Angel?" Gideon's deep voice calling her name brought her back from her thoughts and she looked at him, a smile on her lips.

"Friends?" she asked.

Gideon broke into a grin and nodded. His relief that she was reacting positively was plain on his face. "Yes, friends. Do you think we can manage that, Angel?"

Angel nodded. "Yes, I think we can." She gave a chuckle before continuing, "We're both infuriatingly stubborn. If we set our minds to something and really want it, we can do it."

Gideon laughed softly. "With the added bonus of making a lot of people happy if we get along, instead of yelling at each other all the time."

"We've had some rather explosive fights, haven't we?" Angel said with a grin. It felt rather strange to be teasing Gideon, yet at the same time it felt right for the beginning of a friendship.

"We sure have, and my jaw is still tender from the most recent one." He grinned at Angel, to let her know he was teasing her. She knew that he wasn't angry about that, so she didn't feel guilty, but she still felt that she owed him an apology.

"I'm sorry for that, Matt..."

Gideon cut her off. "I deserved it. Now let's drop it, OK? Today we're starting over as friends. Time to let bygones be bygones." He held out his hand in offering. "Deal?"

Angel looked down at his hand, then slowly took hold of it, and they shook. She smiled back at him. "Deal." They let go of each other's hands, and Angel cocked her head to the one side, frowning. "But you know, I doubt that we'll be able to stop fighting altogether."

Gideon surprised her by laughing. "Not a chance of that."

Angel grinned at Gideon. "Looks like we're in for an interesting friendship then."

Gideon nodded, a warm smile on his face. "But a good one, Angel, and one that will last a lifetime."

{Chapter 1}

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four D

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