

The Witches of Eriadne: *Interlude Four M - Part 1: Awakening*

by *The Space Witches*



Ben Marriot, Captain of Babylon 5

Chapter 1

May 2272

Day 1 : Excalibur - 07:00 EST

Angel stood watching out of the porthole in her quarters, as the Excalibur came alongside Babylon 5. In her minds eye, she could picture the two kilometer long Excalibur looking small by comparison to the massive space station. However amusing the image was, it didn't distract Angel from the awful tightening she felt in her stomach at the thought of being back.

The feeling was only made worse by the fact that the Excalibur was here for a week of maintenance and upgrades. Gideon had announced three days before that only crew essential to the work were to remain on board. The Captain had told everyone that it was the perfect opportunity for them to all get off the ship, and spend a week's shore leave on Babylon 5.

Angel turned from the porthole. Surely there were other places Gideon could have taken the Excalibur? Angel sighed, knowing the answer to that. No, there were few places offering the facilities required by the Excalibur and the opportunity for R & R for her crew. Most of those places weren't exactly locations to which Gideon would want to subject his family. So when it came down to it, Babylon 5 was the most convenient.

*Why did it have to be the one place where memories of Lucas Buck were the most potent for Angel? [Oh for gods sake, Angel! Why do you let memories of *him* always get in the way?] She shook her head and whispered to the empty room, "I don't know."*

The truth was that Angel didn't want to look too closely for the answer. [I'm trying to put him behind me, dammit!] she thought, irritated with herself. Well, she'd make a start by not going to Babylon 5. Angel had told her sisters and the Captain that she wouldn't be joining them on the station. When she had told Demon and Lily her reasons, they had understood, but she knew they weren't happy about her staying behind. Gideon hadn't been happy about it either, but he clearly understood and had agreed that Angel could stay on board Excalibur.

"Just as long as you don't get in the way of the work being carried out, and you behave yourself. That means no pranks, no mischief and no games of Poltergeist," said Matt, pointedly.

Angel smiled as she remembered telling him innocently that she didn't know what he was implying, and that of course she'd behave. He'd then elaborated:

Matthew snorted. "You and the word 'behave' are a case of 'never the twain shall meet'."

Angel wrinkled her nose at Gideon and pouted. "Now you've gone and hurt my feelings. Of course I know what 'behave' means. It's where bees live and make honey." She grinned impishly at the Captain, before breaking into a fit of laughter at her own bad joke. When she noticed him looking at her with raised eyebrows, she tried to stop laughing, but only managed to reduce herself to giggles as she spoke.

"Oh come on, you had to get that? Behave...bee hive?" But when Matt didn't react she cleared her throat and forced herself to stop laughing. "OK, bad joke." Angel sighed seriously and continued. "Relax, Captain. I'll be as good as gold. I won't get in anyone's way. I'll be as unobtrusive as a mouse. It will be as if I'm not even here."

Gideon shook his head and broke into a smile. "Just as long as you don't make like a ghost!"

"I know, I know!" Angel paused to grin at him before going on, "Now come on, Matt. You have to admit that the behave, bee hive line was funny." Angel watched as Gideon shook his head again, the corners of his mouth curving up as he chuckled and headed for the door.

"Don't give up your day job, Angel."

Angel snorted and picked up her Medbay coat, launching it at Gideon, who safely dodged the soft missile. "You're a cruel man sometimes, Matthew Gideon," she said, her lips twitching.

Gideon paused in the now open doorway and grinned back at her. "I know," he paused, as his face turned more serious, "but I still wish you were coming with us." The gentle look of understanding on his face caused Angel's eyes to blur with the threat of tears that she blinked back forcefully.

"Me too," whispered Angel. They both looked at each other for a moment in silence, then Matt stepped into the passageway outside her quarters.

"Just remember, no Poltergeist!" With that parting shot, the door closed behind him, leaving Angel staring after him in amusement.

Angel smiled at the memory, as her mind returned to the present. She was grateful to Gideon for having

put humor into the situation. She just wished she had the strength to face down the memories of Lucas, and join her family for a week of fun and relaxation on board B5.

*Well, it wasn't going to happen this time, unfortunately, and Angel was determined to make the best of the time on board Excalibur. [And I just might have a little fun, despite the Captain's warnings,] thought Angel mischievously. It wasn't as if she'd promised *not* to play Poltergeist. She was just about to settle down and think of ways she could do that, [without being found out by Matt,] when the chiming of the door interrupted her.*

"Angel I know you're frightened, but you can't stay in your quarters every time we come to Babylon 5."

Ever since he'd stopped by her quarters, Luke had been trying to convince Angel to go with him and the rest of her family to B5, but Angel wasn't easily swayed, especially not when she was so anxious.

"Why not?" Asked Angel, rebelliously.

Luke took hold of her hand, ignoring her defiance. "Fears have to be confronted Angel, if you're ever to get past them." Luke squeezed her hand gently. "I understand why you're scared, but you won't have to face this alone. We'll all be there for you and I promise to be with you all the time. You can join me when I visit Medlab, and we'll do other things together. You need never be alone while we're on the station."

*Luke paused to give her a gentle, encouraging smile. "That should make it easier for you to deal with the past if you *are* confronted by it. Say yes, Angel. Prove to yourself that you can beat the memories of Lucas Buck."*

Angel's lips quivered at Luke's concern and understanding. He was right; she had to confront her fears in order to get over them. "Maybe you're right, Luke. Maybe if I'm not alone I might be able to confront my past and release its hold over me," she admitted, swallowing the lump of fear that threatened to choke her.

*Luke drew her into his arms and hugged her fiercely. It was a place Angel felt warm and safe. Ever since Luke had comforted her by spending the night with her, and making love to her, their special friendship had been close. When he pulled back, the smile he gave her was so caring it helped to chase a little of the fear from her heart. "You *can* do this, Angel. I know you can."*

Luke's words were spoken with such faith and conviction that, in that moment, Angel made up her mind to go. She trusted Luke, and if he believed she could do it, and if he was there with her every step of the way, then the least she could do was try.

Angel let out a long shaky breath. "OK, Luke, I'll go with you, but promise me again that you'll be there for me."

"I promise, Angel. In fact," Luke smiled broadly, "we'll be like Siamese twins. So much so that by the end of the week you'll be so sick of me, you'll be begging me to leave you alone."

Angel's lips twitched in amusement. "That will never happen, Luke Raven. I could never grow tired of your charming company."

Luke chuckled. "I'll use those words against you if you try to get rid of me come the end of the week," he warned, teasingly.

Angel laughed, and going on tiptoe, kissed Luke on his cheek. "You won't have to. Now you'd better get going and let me pack."

[Before I chicken out.] Angel quickly chased the negative afterthought away.

Luke smiled at her. "Perfect. I'll go and tell the others about the change of plans. We have to drop off Dasha and Faylinn first. Did Lily tell you that G'Tan had invited the twins and Marcus to spend the next few days with all the Narn little ones? He must be mad! He has eleven kids of his own running around the Marines' quarters, and he offers to take in another three. Still, Demon and Matthew accepted his offer so fast I thought they were going to take his arm off, and when Faylinn and Dasha found out that Marcus was going, of course they had to go, too. So I'll just pick up Naima from the crèche, then I'll come back in about thirty minutes to get you, if that's OK with you?"

Angel had been laughing at the thought of the three kids playing with all the little Narns, but she nodded and smiled, saying, "So we can start being Siamese twins?"

"Exactly!" Said Luke, before he added with a grin, as he headed toward the door, "Your sisters will be so happy you've changed your mind."

Angel called after him, and when he turned to look at her, she smiled softly and whispered, "Thank you, Luke."

Luke returned her smile and nodded, understanding what she was *really* thanking him for. "You're welcome, Angel."

With that, Luke was gone, leaving Angel standing alone in the middle of her living room, suddenly gripped by panic. She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly, continuing to do this several times, until she felt herself calming. Now that she had agreed to go, she was determined to go through with it, and she wasn't about to let her own fear or memories of Lucas stop her. Squaring her shoulders, Angel turned and marched purposefully into her bedroom and began packing.

Day 1 : Babylon 5 - 09:15am EST

The arrival on Babylon 5 went a lot better than Angel had been anticipating. Going through the security check had been a little nerve wracking for her, but thankfully Zack Allan wasn't in charge that morning, so there was less of a reminder of when she and Lucas had arrived on the station. When the group passed through the Zocalo, to get to the section where they would be staying, memories flashed through her mind of when she and Lucas had passed through the area. But Luke took her hand, and with that reassuring contact and the smiles of support from her sisters, the memories were chased away.

Now in her quarters, so different to where she and Lucas had stayed in Downbelow, Angel was feeling more confident that she could face being on Babylon 5 again. Her quarters were right beside Luke, Lily and John's, with an adjoining door providing access. That way she felt she wasn't alone, and Luke could be by her side within seconds, if she needed him. Demon and Gideon were staying in quarters right opposite, so she truly felt surrounded by her family.

[This might not be so hard after all,] thought Angel, and she had to admit that there was an element of excitement to being back on Babylon 5. Something about this station vibrated with life and activity, and if

she could deal with any memories that surfaced. Angel knew she would enjoy the visit. In fact, she could feel a current of anticipation running beneath her skin, a sense that something was going to happen, and that it would be wonderful. Without even realizing it, thoughts of the past and Lucas had already begun to be pushed to the back of her mind.

Angel had just finished unpacking, when there was a knock on the adjoining door.

"Come in," she called.

Luke walked in and smiled, "Have you finished unpacking?"

Angel nodded. "What about you guys?"

Luke laughed. "Lily unpacked in record time, then disappeared across the corridor to go and collect Demon. They're off exploring the shopping Babylon 5 has to offer."

"You mean bounced with excitement across to Demon's," corrected Angel, with a grin. She knew what Lily was like.

"Lily might be a little excited about being able to get some shopping done while we're here, but her bouncing was handicapped by pushing Naima in her stroller," responded Luke, his voice filled with amusement but also great love for his partner.

Angel chuckled. "Demon is going to love being dragged around by a little witch on a shopping spree."

"It will be interesting to see if both sisters join us when we all meet for lunch later," grinned Luke.

"Well..." began Angel, "Demon didn't want to spend her first day here on the station alone in her quarters, while Matt and John visit the station's Captain and C&C. She has no reason to come with us to Medlab, so..."

"That leaves shopping with Lily," finished Luke.

"Exactly," said Angel, "and although Demon would deny it, even she enjoys a little shopping now and then. There are outfits out there that would make Matt's eyes pop out on stalks," she grinned, wickedly.

"All black of course." They spoke in unison, causing them to roar with laughter.

Eventually stopping, Luke walked up to Angel and linked his arm through hers. "The rest of the clan are all out and about, so what do you say we get going as well, and take a look at Medlab?"

Angel nodded, then arm in arm, she and Luke left her quarters.

Day 1 : Medlab - 10:45am EST

Angel stood to one side, and watched as Dr. Hobbes showed Luke the new equipment that had been developed by her team, using the Vorlon technology found on Eriadne combined with Minbari technology. Angel listened with half an ear, as Luke told the doctor of his interest in incorporating the new developments into Excalibur's Medbay. Hobbes didn't see any problems in getting the new equipment

installed while the Excalibur was in dock. Luke began a detailed series of questions on exactly what the new equipment could do.

Angel glanced around Medlab, feeling at a loose end. OK, she was bored. The truth was, the only reason she was here was so she wouldn't be alone. [I should have gone shopping with Demon and Lily,] thought Angel. As long as she wasn't alone, that was the point, right? Angel quickly stifled a yawn and castigated herself. Luke had brought her along because he cared about her. The least she could do was make an effort to show an interest in what Dr. Hobbes was showing him.

Angel couldn't bring herself to do that. All that techno-babble would put her to sleep. Besides, Luke and Dr. Hobbes were so deep in discussion that neither of them noticed she wasn't participating. Straightening up, Angel decided to take a walk around Medlab, while Luke was busy. She noted that neither Luke nor Dr. Hobbes were aware of her leaving.

She wandered around Medlab aimlessly for a while. A few of the staff greeted her and asked her if they could be of assistance, but she declined, saying she was just looking around. Angel didn't hang around any one place for too long, not wanting to get in the way, so she kept moving, going further back into Medlab, stopping now and then to look at things with mild interest.

Eventually, Angel found herself walking down a corridor. Intrigued, she paused and looked at the walls on either side, realizing they were filled with cryo-chambers. All of the chambers were in use. Angel walked up to one and peered at the controls, which indicated that they were set to sustain, in a manner of speaking, the person within the chamber. She looked down the corridor; and saw there must have been at least twenty or thirty of them. She started moving again, stopping every now and then to look at the monitors. There was no indication of why the people inside were there.

[Interesting,] thought Angel, but she didn't think too much of it. Cryonic suspension was a common practice these days, people deciding to be frozen until a particular illness could be cured.

Angel continued walking, following the corridor as it curved, until she came to the end. Instead of a wall, there was an opaque glass panel stretching from one side of the corridor to the other, sectioning it off. The door to the other side was ajar and beyond it, Angel could hear the sound of a monitor beeping. [What do we have here?] She knew she just being nosy now--[Too much time spent around the Captain,] thought Angel, with a smile--but with nothing better to do, she decided to poke her head in, to see what was inside the little room.

Checking back to make sure no one was coming, [Don't want to get caught, just in case I shouldn't be back here,] Angel walked to the door and peeked in. Her eyes widened in surprise at what she saw. Totally intrigued, Angel moved inside the room.

The room was bare, except for a lone cryo-chamber in the middle. Having this one set apart from the others made Angel curious, and she walked up to it. The monitor indicated that yet again, there was someone inside. Angel looked down at the small window on the top of the chamber, expected it to be iced over, but she could just make out the figure lying within. She moved around to the far side, to see if she could find any identification of the person inside. To her surprise, she found something. There was a plaque attached to the side. Angel bent down to read it.

*Subject: Marcus Cole
Designation: Ranger*

Status: Deceased

Comments: Indefinite hold in the event of new resuscitation technology.

Requested by: Cmdr. S. Ivanova"

Marcus Cole," whispered Angel, in awe. She remembered the stories she had heard when she was in Downbelow.

Marcus Cole had been a Ranger based at Babylon 5, at the same time as Commander Susan Ivanova was second in command to John Sheridan. During the final battle against Earth, Commander Ivanova had been seriously injured, and was not expected to live. Marcus Cole had left the battle and raced to her side. Knowing of an ancient, alien healing device, Marcus had taken it, and used it to transfer his life force into Ivanova. No one really knew why he'd done it, but everyone said he'd died for love. He'd given his life because he loved Ivanova so much, he couldn't bear for her to die.

Angel felt warm moisture on her cheeks, and she raised a hand to wipe away the tears. It broke her heart that someone so brave and noble should have had to die, in order to save the woman he loved. Angel reached out and touched the cryo-chamber.

[It's not fair, it shouldn't have ended that way.] thought Angel, sadly.

She had never heard anything about Marcus Cole being put into suspension, but from the words on the plaque, Ivanova had Marcus held there, in the hope that one day, maybe he could be brought back.

As Angel stood there, she felt as if electricity was surging beneath the surface of her skin, and heat began to leap throughout her body. Her heart thumped faster in her chest, and her mind whirled with a rush of thoughts. Then just as quickly, her body calmed and her mind stilled, except for one thought.

[I can bring him back.]

It wasn't madness that made her think this, or a grand delusion. She had hoped that one day she might be given a chance to redeem a terrible mistake she had once made, when she had brought Lucas Buck back from oblivion. A life had been lost. The soul, essentially the life force, had been taken from Dureena's unborn child, giving Lucas a body and life again. Angel closed her eyes on the pain that memory still inflicted on her heart.

Over the years since that tragedy, Angel had secretly gone over the spell Lucas had guided her to use. She kept trying to alter it and change it, so that a life could be brought back without another having to die. Angel had never considered the possibility that she would actually use the spell; she just wanted to make it safe. Finally, she had found a way to alter the spell, so that someone could give part of his or her life force to another, without the giver dying. The only problem was that the spell required the combined power of her and at least two of her sisters.

Angel opened her eyes and gazed at the barely visible figure in the cryo-chamber. Now she knew what that feeling of anticipation had been when she first entered Babylon 5. She knew she had to bring Marcus Cole back. It was suddenly more important to her than anything had ever been before in her life. The difficult question was how could she approach Demon and Lily about it? They would be shocked to learn Angel had been working on such a dangerous spell again. Would they help her do this? Would they understand how important this was to her? Would they see how perfect it was? Her sense of salvation was to come from what she did here today on Babylon 5, where before the place had brought her nothing but pain.

The other problem was being able to perform the spell, without anyone catching them, and then being able to explain how they'd brought Marcus Cole back to life, without exposing who and what the sisters really were. Angel chewed her lip. The first part was probably the easiest. If they could get into Medlab in the early hours of the morning, there would only be a small night shift on duty. The trick would be getting past anyone there, without being seen. At least the room the cryo-chamber was situated in was as far from the main area of Medlab as possible. The spell wouldn't make a lot of noise, so the chances of being heard were minimal.

Angel knew this wouldn't be easy at all. First, she would need to tackle her sisters and see whether they would help her. [If I explain my reasons for doing it, maybe they'll agree,] thought Angel, hopefully. [I can't do this alone.] If Demon and Lily did agree, maybe Demon could think of a way to explain how they brought Marcus back without magic being mentioned. Angel knew this would be difficult to accomplish, but not impossible, especially not if her sisters helped her.

Angel reached out her hand and placed it on the cryo-chamber. "I'm going to bring you back, Marcus Cole, then maybe your love story can have a happy ending," she said, softly.

"Angel? Are you back here?"

The sound of Luke's voice made her head snap up and she jumped away from the cryo-chamber.

"Shit!" She had totally forgotten about Luke, and she realized she'd been gone for awhile and he must have noticed her absence.

"Angel?" Luke's voice called again.

She didn't want Luke to find her in here. He'd ask what she was doing, and she wouldn't be able to lie to him. She never could lie to Luke. And if Luke knew what she was planning, he'd never let her go through with it.

"I'll be back," whispered Angel to the frozen figure inside the chamber, then moving quickly, she exited the room. She hurried back up the corridor, meeting Luke just as he was about to come around the corner.

"Luke!" said Angel, a little more cheerfully than sounded natural. [Easy girl!]

Luke looked at her quizzically. "Where have you been?"

Angel smiled. "Just looking around."

When Luke looked past her, Angel felt her nerves getting jumpy. "Find anything interesting?" asked Luke, in his usual quiet voice, but to Angel it sounded like a loaded question. Maybe Luke knew what was back there, and he was testing to see if she admitted to having found Marcus Cole's cryo-chamber.

[Don't be stupid,] Angel told herself. She was only feeling that way because she was hiding something.

Smiling widely, Angel took Luke's hand and shrugged. "Oh, just a lot of cryo-chambers full of frozen people. No one I knew." She started walking, pulling Luke along, as she quickly changed the subject.

"So, how'd your meeting with Dr. Hobbes go?"

To her relief, Luke was oblivious to the sudden change in topic, and he started telling her all about it as they left Medlab and headed towards the Zocalo, where they'd be meeting the family for lunch.

Of course, Angel didn't hear a word Luke said. She was too busy thinking about a cryo-chamber in a small room in Medlab.

Day 1 : B5 Captain's Office - 11:00am EST

John watched as his Captain leaned back in his chair and sighed, saying, "That's it, Ben. If you can get your cargo handlers to shift that lot over to the Excalibur by the end of the week, we'll be on our way."

Captain Ben Marriot nodded. "Shouldn't be a problem. Anyway, the sooner I can get this organized, the sooner I get your crew off B5. Dammit, Matt, those Narn Marines of yours do know how to party! Last time you were here, they damn near tore apart the casino."

Matheson cleared his throat quietly and interceded. "You can be sure that won't happen again, Captain Marriot. G'Tan is keeping his troops on a very short leash this time." John smiled to himself as he thought about how G'Tan was keeping his people occupied: babysitting the Captain's and XO's children, as well as G'Tan's own brood.

Marriot grinned over his desk at John, his dark brown eyes sparkling with humor. "I bet he will. Did Matt give the Narns one of his famous dressing downs after the last visit? He has a reputation for being able to blister paint with one of those lectures. Which is ironic since Matt was one of the greatest party animals in Earthforce in his younger days."

John turned to his Captain and raised a quizzical eyebrow. Gideon laughed and said, "Don't believe everything this old rogue tells you, John. If I got involved in any parties, it was as an innocent bystander, watching the master at work." He used his thumb to point across the desk at the Captain of B5.

John shook his head and smiled, looking from one Captain to the other. Marriot was the same age as Gideon, and they had been at EF academy together, but the Captain of B5 looked much older. He was a swarthy man, with dark eyes, and hair that must once have been dark, thick and wavy. Now it was almost completely gray, and his face showed lines of age and pain. Marriot looked a decade older than Gideon, not his contemporary.

John smiled at Marriot. "I'd love to hear some of those stories, Captain. I suspect it could be career enhancing for Matthew's XO to know such things."

Marriot roared with laughter, and waved John and Gideon over to the sofas, which stood facing each other, at right angles to the window of his office. As the two officers from the Excalibur moved to sit either side of the central coffee table, Marriot wheeled himself out from behind the desk to join them.

John wondered how tall Marriot would have been before his accident. He was a strongly built man, and from his length of leg, John guessed he would have topped Matthew by a couple of centimeters. He knew that Marriot had been confined to the wheelchair for over ten years, since having broken his back during the battle for Proxima 3 in 2261. He'd been serving aboard the Heracles when it had fought the Agamemnon, with Sheridan in command. Matthew had told John how Ben Marriot had been trying to lead a party to the bridge of the Heracles, to relieve her Captain of duty and end the fight, when he'd been thrown down an access ladder and broken his back. Since that day, Marriot had been paralyzed from the

waist down.

After their visit to B5 in December 2270--the first time John had met Marriot--Gideon had told him how it had always been Ben's dream to command an Explorer class ship, but his accident had prevented that dream ever becoming a reality. He'd been confined to desk jobs by his wheelchair, and now had the ultimate in desk jobs: command of Babylon 5.

"So, Commander, you want to know some stories about Matt's misspent youth, do you? I think I can do that." Marriot's grin was pure evil, as he overrode Gideon's protests and continued, "Did he ever tell you about how close he came to getting married as an Ensign? No? Well, that's a story worth hearing."

Day 1 : The Zocalo - 11:10am EST

"Aren't you happy that you let me talk you into looking in that lingerie shop?" Lily grinned up at Demon, who was walking beside her with one small bag, pushing Naima in her stroller, while the tiny redhead had two big bags in her hands, with several smaller ones inside them. They had already been shopping for quite a while before walking up to the lingerie shop, so Demon had only agreed to go in after Lily had promised that they'd go straight back to their quarters afterwards. They had ended up spending almost an hour there. Fortunately, Naima had slept the whole time.

"I guess it was worth having to endure you trying on half of said lingerie."

Lily snorted. "At least half of them were too large for me. And you were no better. How anyone can take so long to choose one item is beyond me." She glanced casually ahead, and stopped suddenly, not hearing Demon's reply as her attention was captured by one of the shops ahead.

[[Hey, did you suddenly turn to stone or what?]] Demon's voice asked in her head.

Lily started, then dragged her eyes to look up at the tall blonde, who looked at her with raised eyebrows. "Oh, no, it's just... Do you remember that tree goddess statue I saw when we were on B5 after the Jones investigation?"

"How could I forget it? You kept complaining about not being able to get it for months afterwards." Demon grinned wickedly, as Lily stuck out her tongue.

"Well, this is the shop where I saw it." Lily, having both her hands full of bags, pointed forward with her chin, then looked pleadingly up at Demon, biting her lower lip.

"And of course, you want to go see if they still have it." Demon paused, then added, "Did you ever give them a call and ask if they could have the statue delivered to the Excalibur, or keep it for you until the next time we came here?"

Lily felt like banging her head against a wall as she stared at her oldest sister, then grimaced. "Oh Goddess, how stupid of me! I could have gone through B5's C&C." She gave Demon a mock exasperated look. "Why didn't you ask me that back then?"

Demon snorted. "You usually don't need help getting something you want." She grinned down at Lily, then sighed and looked around. "Well, I will not have you telling me for the rest of my life that it was my fault you couldn't get your statue. So how about if Naima and I wait in that café just opposite the shop,

while you go look for your tree goddess?"

Lily rushed to give her sister a hug, almost making her stumble backwards. "Thank you! I promise I won't take too long!" Letting go of her sister, she held out her bags. "Could you hold these for me, please? Thanks!"

Demon sighed theatrically, letting go of the stroller with one hand to take the bags. Then she grinned. "Don't be long! Naima will be awake and wanting her Ma soon!"

Lily blew a kiss at her sleeping daughter, saying, "I won't!" then rushed toward the shop. [Please, be there...]

Day 1 : B5 Captain's Office - 11:15am EST

Ben Marriot ignored his old friend's protests and settled in to enjoy himself. He could see that Matt and his XO were friends as well as colleagues, and he knew that Matheson could be trusted implicitly. This was just too good a chance to miss. Besides, Matt seemed to have got a little too complacent and smug, after finding the Cure, and Ben doubted whether the Captain of the Excalibur could find any hat to fit these days.

"When we were both new Ensigns on the Vesta, Matt was known to be a bit of a ladies man, but his tastes were totally predictable. He loved to flirt with luscious brunettes, the curvier the better. He always said he loved the whole package, but the rest of us knew that Matt Gideon always looked for big breasts on his women."

*Matt was trying to shut him up, but Marriot ignored him. "We used to tell him that the type he loved would end up twice the size and with a mustache in ten years time, but he never wanted to listen. Any curvaceous Latin type who crossed his path would have young Matt howling like a hound dog. And if she had bright blue eyes, he would just roll on his back and beg her to tickle his tummy--at least, that's what he *said* he wanted tickled."*

Ben was gratified to see John Matheson was grinning from ear to ear, while Matt continued to protest that it was all fantasy. "We were on one of the Orion colonies when Matt met this young singer and guitar player called Yvette. She could hardly sing a note, but Matt never noticed, as she had curves in all the right places, breasts a man could drown in, and the brightest blue eyes you have ever seen. Matt's tongue was hanging out so far he could barely get it under control to sweet talk her."

Matt butted in, "She didn't need much sweet talking! She was hot as hell and raring to go!"

Ben grinned over at John. "If the sounds coming from her bedroom over the bar were anything to go by, Yvette wanted whatever our young Lothario was willing to give her." He put on a falsetto voice with a French accent, "Ooh Mattie, harder Mattie! Ooh yes, Mattie, yes, do that again!" Dropping back into this normal voice, Ben went on, "All this to the sound of rhythmic thumping, as the head of her bed was banging against the wall."

Matheson was doubled up with laughter by now and Gideon interrupted again, the faintest signs of a blush covering his cheeks. "You were just jealous! Anyway, she was a hell of a lot more experienced than I was back then. That girl knew things which opened my eyes wide. I was just an innocent, and she took advantage of me."

That statement had Matheson howling with laughter and Matt couldn't quite maintain the look of wounded innocence he'd been trying for.

Ben continued with his story. "It turned out that young Yvette was trying to take advantage of more than Matt's fine physique and stamina. She'd spotted him as a good catch, and had set him up. Matt wasn't amused when her four brothers, all bigger than he was, marched into her bedroom, catching them in flagrante." He grinned across at Matt, and was amused to see some of the color drain from his old friend's face at the memory.

"God, that was scary! John, imagine this. This girl had ridden me raw. She'd been on top, underneath, in front, behind, sideways, you name it. She wanted it in every position in the Kama Sutra, and a few that aren't listed there! I was twenty-two, pumped full of hormones from months locked up in a star ship, and I was willing to oblige her in any way I could. Well, I'd obliged her several times already, and had her settled on all fours on the bed, with me standing behind her, and we were going at it like jack rabbits."

Ben was laughing too, as he imagined how the young Gideon must have looked. He just wished he had a vid of what had happened next. Matt still sounded outraged as he went on, "Then her four brothers walked in on us. She had her head buried in the pillow so she didn't even see them. I was still pumping away on automatic, when they grabbed me and pulled me off her. They batted me around the room a few times, with Yvette screaming at them to wait until she'd finished, then changing her story and telling them I was a cad and a brute, who had taken her innocence away! I'm telling you, John, of the two of us, I was the innocent!"

"When they stopped pushing me around, they threw my clothes at me, pushed me into the room next door, and told me to get dressed, as I couldn't go to my wedding naked. I sort of gulped a few times, and whimpered, 'Wedding? What do you mean, wedding?' OK, so I wasn't very quick on the uptake back then. I told you I was an innocent!"

Matt's attempt at outraged virtue was enough to set Matheson off into another bout of laughter, so Ben took up the story.

"Downstairs in the bar, we'd heard the banging and thumping, and had just assumed that Matt and Yvette were getting serious, but then my commlink beeped. Fortunately, Matt had put his link in his pocket where the brothers hadn't seen it, so he was able to call for help when they pushed him into the next room."

Matt's tone still sounded aggrieved as he interrupted, "But do you know what these bastards did, John? They waited. They waited until I'd been hustled into the church next door, the priest was in front of us and Yvette had already said, 'I do!' Then the bastards burst in and arrested me!"

Ben rocked back and forth in his wheelchair at the memory of the anguished look on Matt's face, as his friends had burst through the church doors with a team of Marines. He was hardly able to choke out, "We told them he was being arrested for bigamy, as he already had a wife on Earth and one on Mars. They fell for it, and poor Yvette fell to her knees, grabbing at her 'Mattie', wanting to know how he could have abused her so. We frog-marched him out of there, and I've never seen a man so happy to be under arrest in my life!"

As the three men gradually stopped laughing, Ben looked at Matt and smiled. His friend had seen some rough times after that, and the loss of the Cerberus had haunted him for years, but Matt now looked

relaxed and happy. Ben had met Matt's wife and son when they had last visited B5, and he knew the reason for his old friend's contentment. Only one thing puzzled him. Given Matt's previous taste in women, when Ben had first met Matt's family, he'd initially assumed that Angel must be his wife. Marriot had been astonished when he'd been introduced to Demon, and told that Angel was Matt's sister-in-law. Then again, Ben recollected a few looks Matt had given Angel, and he wondered. He shook his head, telling himself it was none of his business.

Matt was grinning at him. "I owe you for that one. And there's a way I'd like to repay the debt." Matt's smile softened, and he became more earnest as he leaned forward in his seat. "My ship's doctor has more experience of regenerator technology than anyone else alive. He lived on the planet where those instruments came from, for six months. I know that previous attempts to regenerate your damaged spine haven't been successful, but will you come over to the Excalibur before we leave, and let Luke Raven take a look at you?"

The offer was unexpected, and Ben didn't know how to respond. He'd given up hope of ever walking again. His hopes had been raised when the regenerators had first been discovered, and he'd undergone every treatment and test available, but none had worked. So Ben had put his hopes back in a box labeled 'Forget it' and got on with his life. Now his old friend wanted to open that box again, and Ben wasn't sure he could stand another disappointment.

He looked across at Matt, about to refuse, when he saw the look in Matt's eyes. This was important to his old friend. Matt was desperate to help him. Ben knew that some of this stemmed from Matt's guilt about having everything Ben had ever wanted: Command of an Explorer class ship, command of the Excalibur, a wife, and a son. All the things Ben could never have. Matt felt guilty as hell.

"Please."

All of Matt's guilt was expressed in that one word, and Ben found that he couldn't refuse.

"OK."

Day 1 : The Zocalo - 11:30am EST

Lily entered almost reluctantly, looking around wide-eyed. She couldn't see anyone, but heard a voice from a room in the back, behind a doorway hung with a beaded curtain. The shop's main room was full of statues of various sizes and materials, paintings, and other works of art. Paying special attention to the statues, Lily meandered between the shelves and tables. She hardly dared to hope that the tree goddess statue, which she had seen in the shop's window more than two years earlier, was still there somewhere. The further she got, the more her heart sank. She saw many beautiful statues, but no tree goddess. Walking toward the door again, Lily decided to make another round, just to be sure she hadn't missed it. [Maybe I didn't see the wood for the trees.]

"I remember you."

Lily whirled around, towards the back of the room where the voice had come from.

Rahul Jai registered at the edge of his consciousness that someone had entered his shop, while he was talking to one of his regular clients on the comm. unit in his office. Smiling to himself, Rahul closed the

connection. It was clients like this one who kept his shop profitable, with regular orders.

Standing, Rahul walked toward the doorway connecting the office to the shop, peeking out through the beaded curtain, to see who had come inside and what they were looking at. That way, he could get an idea of what they were interested in.

Rahul's eyes widened, when he saw the woman looking around at the statues and figurines in his shop, his mind going back to a day over two years before.

Rahul Jai glanced across to his shop in the Zocalo, while listening to Mrs. Schmidt, the elderly owner of a bar located directly opposite his shop. Rahul had been on his way back from his cousin's apartment when Mrs. Schmidt had stopped him, stepping into his way so he'd been unable to evade her. Rahul had tried to walk away several times in the past ten minutes, but the elderly woman had kept holding onto his arm, while going on and on about her many health problems. Rahul didn't know if they were real or imagined, or just an excuse to chat him up. His cousin had suggested the latter a while ago, teasing him that Mrs. Schmidt was bedazzled by his handsome dark face, warm eyes, and long, silky black hair. Whatever the reason, Rahul wished she'd grow tired of him and go look for another victim, the sooner the better. [They'll have to kill that mouth separately when she dies!]

Glancing across to his shop again, Rahul saw red-literally. Through a momentary gap in the crowd, he could make out a mass of red curls, belonging to a tiny human female clad in green. She was pressing her face against his shop window, staring at something he had on display there. From where the redhead was standing, he guessed she must be looking at his tree goddess statue. For a moment, Rahul lost sight of her as a group of Drazi passed in front of him, and he silently cursed, stretching his neck. The next time he saw her, she was standing in front of his closed shop door. From the expression on her face, she seemed to be pleading with the two human males standing next to her, one Asian and one white, each carrying a baby in a sling.

Rahul whirled back around to Mrs. Schmidt. "I'm sorry, but I have customers waiting. Have a good day." He tore his arm from the elderly woman's grip and hurried through the crowd as fast as he could, which was much too slow for his taste. By the time he arrived in front of his shop, he saw the redhead walking away between the two men, her arms hooked through theirs, as she threw one last longing look back at the statue.

[Damn! Finally someone who looks like an interested and interesting customer, and I miss her!] He sighed, then smiled. [At least I got rid of Mrs. Schmidt thanks to that redhead.] Rahul turned, looking at the tree goddess statue in his shop window with narrowed eyes, then back again to where the redhead and her two companions had disappeared in the crowd, a smile spreading slowly on his face as he felt an idea grow inside him.

[Can it truly be? I can't be wrong, this is the same woman. That long, fiery red hair, the delicate build, and the green clothes.] She looked even more stunning closer up. Rahul watched the red-haired beauty as she studied the statues intently, a concentrated look on her face. [As if she was searching for something. I hope I was right, and will be able to help her.]

Pushing the beaded strands of the curtain apart, Rahul stepped into the shop. "I remember you."

The tiny redhead whirled around, looking at him wide-eyed for a second, before cocking her head to the side, frowning slightly. "I'm sorry, but..."

Rahul lifted his hand, smiling as he walked around the counter toward her. "No, you probably don't. In fact, I'm quite certain that you didn't even see me. You were looking at something in the window, but I was held up by the owner of the bar--may she rest in peace--that used to be over there." He gestured towards the café that now replaced Mrs. Schmidt's bar. "By the time I made it back, you were already leaving with the two men accompanying you, who were carrying two children, I believe."

"Yes, my partners and our children were with me." The redhead broke into a light, rippling laugh, giving him an incredulous look as he stood before her. "That was over two years ago!"

He shrugged. "It's not often that I have someone press her face against my shop window, especially such a beautiful woman. But I forget my manners--Rahul Jai, at your service, Ma'am." He bowed his head.

The redhead smiled up at him, curtsying gracefully. "Lilith Morgaine, but everybody calls me Lily." Pausing briefly, her expression changed to a slight frown, her incredibly green eyes looking at him intensely. "You don't still have that tree goddess statue, which I saw in your shop window back then, do you?" she asked, almost hesitatingly.

Rahul frowned, assuming a pensive expression. "Tree goddess? Hmm... let me see." He disappeared into his office, secretly smiling to himself.

Lily watched Rahul walk away from her, allowing the view to distract her from her carefully moderated excitement and hope. She let her eyes wander down his body and back up again, before he disappeared behind the counter and then into the back room. Rahul's last name, Jai, sounded Indian, but she was less sure about his first name. And from his looks, he could have been anything from Indian to Mexican, with dark skin, warm, dark brown eyes and long, straight silky black hair flowing down his back to his waist. She could guess that hidden under his clothes was a well-formed body. [Very nice indeed. And charming too.]

Lily's thoughts were brought back to the reason for her visit when she heard him rummaging around in the back room. She tried to clamp down on her impatience and anxiety. [He didn't give me a final 'No', so there's hope. Though he'll probably come back with something similar but not as wonderful as the real thing by far.] She could still see the statue clearly in her mind, remembering how much attention had been paid to the details both in sculpting and painting it. She knew it was silly to have felt such a sense of loss at not being able to get a statue, but just that attention to detail told her how much love the artist had put in its creation, and that must have been part of what made it so special. She had told John it had felt as if the statue had been waiting there for her. [If he doesn't have it anymore, I hope whoever got it at least knows to appreciate it, not just for its looks, but also for its spiritual meaning.]

She was roused from her thoughts when Rahul returned from the back room, balancing a big box on his hands, which he put onto the counter. Lily suppressed a spike of excitement, and forced herself to not run as she joined him there.

She watched Rahul as he opened the flaps of the box, peeking inside and making a nondescript noise in the back of his throat. Lily was tempted to jump up onto the counter, as she was too small to see inside from where she stood, but decided that this would shock Rahul, and she didn't want him to drop the statue. "Well?"

Rahul looked at her briefly, then tipped the box over toward him with one hand, reaching inside with the other. Carefully, he pulled the contents out. Lily was still unable to see it, as the box was in her line of sight. Before she could push it aside, she saw the edges of his mouth twitch slightly as he asked, "Is this the one you were looking for?" setting a statue down on the counter.

The second of utter silence, while Lily stared at the statue open-mouthed, was shattered by her deafening squeal of delight. Rahul flinched, but smiled when she rushed forward, exploring the tree goddess with her hands, gently, as if she needed physical confirmation of its existence, but was afraid to damage it.

Lily looked up at Rahul, licking her lips, before saying in a shaky voice, "I didn't dare to hope. You have no idea how much this means to me!" Her eyes were moist, and she sniffled, then grinned sheepishly. "You must think me very silly."

"Not at all. I'm very happy that I created something which touches you so deeply." He grinned, satisfied that the surprise had worked.

"You made it?" Rahul nodded. "Are these all your works, then?" Lily gestured at the artworks in the shop.

"Some of them. Others are from friends."

"You're very talented, Rahul!" She looked at the tree goddess lovingly. "This one must be your masterpiece! It's so perfect." Her eyes rose to meet his with a questioning look. "How come you still have it? And why not in your shop, but stashed away?"

Rahul shrugged, grinning. "I took a wild guess that this was what you had been looking at. Even from afar, I could see how much you wanted it, so I stored it, just in case you'd come back some day. It took a little longer than I'd thought, but it turns out I was right."

Lily blinked a few times, opening her mouth, closed it again and swallowed, then finally said, "I don't believe it!"

"You should. This isn't a dream, despite appearances."

Lily studied Rahul's face, puzzled by his last words. As their eyes met, she saw slight embarrassment, but also attraction, wanting and longing in his eyes--and to her surprise, she found that it was mutual. [What's happening to me?] she wondered, as they stared at each other over the counter. It wasn't the first time she'd met an attractive man, since living on the Excalibur with John and Luke. Neither was she in any way frustrated or bored with their relationship; she certainly didn't need to look for sexual bliss outside it. And yet Lily could feel, physically, that she wanted this stranger. [Maybe it's just the thrill of the new, the unknown?] Whatever it was, it was there, and a few years before, she may have given in to the temptation, but Lily discovered that even though John and Luke wouldn't see it as a betrayal, she didn't want to stray.

She smiled and wanted to say something to break the silence, but Rahul was quicker. "I'm sorry."

Rahul still found himself unable to tear his eyes from Lily's. The attraction between them was almost tangible; her slightly parted lips tempting him to kiss them. [No! She isn't free, don't be foolish!]

Lily shook her head almost imperceptibly. "There's nothing to be sorry about."

"Oh, there is. Like not meeting you before." Rahul gave her a wry smile, knowing she'd understand his unspoken words.

Lily chuckled. "That would hardly have been possible." When he looked at her questioningly, she shook her head, smiling. "It's a very long and complicated story." Suddenly her eyes widened. "Oh dear! My sister is waiting for me at the café! It's a wonder she hasn't come looking for me yet!"

Rahul took a deep breath, firmly banning any stray thoughts and feelings to the dark recesses of his mind. "Would you like to take the statue with you, or shall I have it delivered to your ship?"

"I guess John and Luke would prefer not having to haul it back to the Excalibur, with all the other stuff I've bought." Lily smiled, her love for the two men obvious, and Rahul found he was envious of them.

[No two men should be allowed to have this woman to themselves exclusively. Ah, well.] He smiled back at her. "It will be waiting for you on your return to the ship, then."

"Thank you. But we haven't talked about the price yet." When Rahul named an amount, she gave him a narrow-eyed look. "That can't be the real price. It's not nearly high enough..."

He interrupted her, "That's my price, and I don't want to hear any arguments."

He watched Lily sigh and shake her head. "You're lucky my sister is waiting outside, so I don't have time to argue."

Finances and delivery details settled, Rahul accompanied her to the door. "If you're ever looking for anything special, let me know."

"I will." Lily turned at the door, smiling warmly as she looked up at him. "Thank you, Rahul."

"It was a pleasure. It's people like you who make my work worthwhile." He smiled back at her, then bowed, pressing his hands together and lifting them up to his forehead, fingers touching his brow. "Namaste."

"Namaste." Lily copied his gesture, still smiling as she stood, then turned and left. After a few steps, she turned. "I hope your shop will still be here the next time we come to Babylon 5. I can't wait to see your new works." Grinning, she waved, then hurried through the crowd toward the café opposite Rahul's shop.

Rahul chuckled as she disappeared in the crowd, then sighed. [Time to get back to work.]

Lily burst through the doors of the café, and ran to where she could see Demon bending over Naima's stroller. "Demon, you won't believe..." Her words ran down as she saw the tall blonde's guilty expression, then looked at her daughter, sitting in the stroller, grinning up at her mother. Lily started to laugh. "Just look at the pair of you! You're as bad as each other!"

Demon had been trying to wipe the mess of chocolate and cream off Naima's mouth, not even aware that her own mouth was nearly as messy. Lily glanced at the table where Demon sat, seeing the remains of two very large chocolate éclairs on a plate there.

The tall blonde grinned up at the tiny red-head and pointed to the laughing baby girl. "It was her fault! She made me buy them, then she forced me to eat one." Lily burst out laughing and she pulled out her own clean handkerchief to wipe her daughter's mouth.

Day 1 : Fresh Air restaurant - 2:30 pm EST

Demon sat observing Angel carefully across the lunch table. Her sister was very reserved, rarely adding anything to the conversation that had flowed back and forth over lunch. When she did, it was only because someone had spoken directly to her.

The blonde witch was perplexed. When she and Lily had joined Luke, John, Matthew and Angel for lunch, Angel had appeared in good spirits, and had even been teasing Luke when they arrived, but now she was quiet. Demon was for a moment concerned that memories of the past might be invading her sister's peace of mind, but for some reason, she didn't think so. Even though her sister was reserved, Angel's body language and sparkling eyes indicated that her mood was far from low. In fact, it was more as if...

Demon's eyes widened, as she suddenly realized what was going on. She knew her sister well enough to know that her being quiet, but with her blue eyes sparkling, meant that Angel was preoccupied. And usually when Angel was preoccupied it could mean only one thing.

[Angel, what are you up to?] Demon's thoughts were interrupted, as Matthew turned to her and asked her a question. She forced herself to stop thinking about her sister for the moment.

"So, are you going to tell me what this little something is that you bought, while you and Lily were out shopping this morning?"

[Nosy bugger.] thought Demon, affectionately. "Oh, you'll find out later, darling," responded Demon, purposefully lowering her voice to make it more seductive.

John and Luke chuckled, and winked at Matthew, which earned them a warning scowl from their friend. The two men quickly engaged a giggling Lily in a conversation about the baby clothes she had bought for the twins and Naima. Matthew snorted softly, before he looked back at Demon, and gave her a wolfish grin, lowering his voice as he spoke, so that only she could hear what he was saying. "I do hope finding out involves a strip search?"

Demon smiled coquettishly and whispered back. "That's a certainty."

Her smile changed into a grin, as she saw the look of obvious hunger and anticipation on her husband's handsome face, as he said, "Do you think the others will mind if I drag you off to our quarters, right now?"

As much as the idea appealed to Demon, she found herself watching Angel, and she knew she couldn't wait until morning to find out what was going on with her sister. "I'd love that, Matthew, and I'm sure everyone would understand..."

"But you want to talk with Angel?" Matthew interrupted softly, as his eyes followed where Demon was looking. She didn't know why it should have surprised her that her husband knew what was on her mind. Matthew was very observant and he wouldn't have missed the fact that Angel was rather subdued. Demon had no doubt that alarm bells were going off in his head, yelling "DANGER, MATTHEW GIDEON! DANGER! DANGER!" to misquote a TV show from her youth.

Demon smiled lovingly at her husband and nodded, "I just want to see if she's OK." [And to make sure she's not up to something she shouldn't be,] added Demon to herself.

Matthew lifted her hand to his mouth, and kissed it, saying tenderly, "I understand. I'll have the bed warmed for you when you get back."

Demon leaned forward and gave her husband a brief kiss, then whispered, "Thank you for understanding. I promise when I get back, you'll get to carry out that strip search."

Matthew chuckled. "I'm counting on it."

He retained his hold on Demon's hand, as they both focused their attention back on the others around the lunch table, and joined in the conversation, which had now turned to a discussion as to who was the better Captain: Kirk or Picard.

Angel had tried to take part in the conversation going on during lunch, but she had found it extremely difficult. Her mind was too preoccupied with thoughts of Marcus Cole. How she could bring him back to life, and how she could approach her sisters about helping her do it?

She had been fully aware of Demon's scrutiny over the lunch table, and breathed a sigh of relief when something had come up to draw Demon's attention away from her and onto Gideon. As the afternoon progressed, and lunch drew to an end, Demon didn't watch Angel as often, although the younger woman was aware of the occasional watchful glance from her sister.

Now, thankfully, lunch was over, and everyone was making their way out of the restaurant. Angel decided that now was the best time to try and catch her sisters, to talk. "Lily, Demon? Do you think you could come back to my quarters? I'd really like to talk with both of you."

Lily and Demon both paused, and a look passed between the two of them. It was brief, but long enough for Angel to suspect that her sisters had been expecting her request.

"I'm glad you asked, Angel. Lily and I were about to ask if you wouldn't mind a little company," said Demon.

"Oh, that's perfect. Yes, I'd love some company. As long as your men don't mind?" Lily and Demon didn't have to answer, as Luke, John, and Matthew agreed that they'd find some way to amuse themselves. At any other time, Angel might have asked teasingly what that could be, but she was too tightly wound to engage them in banter. All she could manage was a small smile and a thank you, as they all headed through the Zocalo and back to their quarters.

Day 1 : Angel's Room - 16:00 EST

"Angel"

Angel flinched, as both Demon and Lily barked her name in unison and stared at her in disbelief. She'd just finished telling them about what she'd found in Medlab, and her desire to bring Marcus Cole back, using the altered life-force spell. She was about to try and explain further, when Demon spoke.

"What were you thinking, Angel?" Asked Demon, in the calm tone that made Angel wish her sister would stop repressing her emotions and yell at her. On second thought, Lily was going to do enough screaming for the two of them.

"I just happened upon the stasis chamber. It wasn't intentional," said Angel, defensively.

Demon pursed her lips and snapped at her sister. "That's not what I was talking about, and you know it!"

It took an enormous amount of control for Angel not to snap back. She had anticipated her sisters being a little upset, and she had to remain calm and rational, if she was going to get them to understand why she had to do this.

"Angel, what were you thinking, messing around with that spell again?" Lily asked in confusion.

Angel sighed and looked at her sister sadly. "I was thinking that if I could render the spell harmless, then no innocent life could be lost if it was ever used again. I made an awful mistake once, and it will haunt me for the rest of my life. I worked on the spell and succeeded in changing it, so that it can still be used to bring a life back, using our combined powers to enhance the givers life force, without a life being taken. You have to believe me, I'd never ask for your help with this, or suggest using the life force spell, if I wasn't absolutely sure it was safe," Angel finished, emotionally.

"We know you'd never use a dangerous spell like that again, Angel, but you have to understand our reservations." Lily's concerns were clear from her tone.

"Yes I do, Lily," Angel paused for a moment. "Look, if I let you go over the spell and you think it's safe, will both of you agree to help me with this? Please?" Angel looked imploringly from one sister to the other.

Demon and Lily looked at each other. Angel knew they were linking to discuss and decide if they should go along with Angel's request. For a moment, she wished Ilas was there with them. She was sure the little shape-shifter would have understood her need. It was, after all, Ilas' child as much as Dureena's, who had been killed bring Lucas back to life. Finally, they nodded. "OK, Angel. Lily will look at the spell, and if she says it's safe, then we'll consider helping you," said Demon.

"Thank you, both of you!"

"Don't get too excited yet, Angel. Even if Lily says 'yes', there's still a lot to consider. I hope you have a plan, because if you don't, we aren't doing this. It would be too risky, understand?"

Angel nodded.

"There's one more thing I want you to tell me, before we move onto the spell," began Demon. "Why is this so important to you, Angel? You never knew Marcus Cole."

"You know why, Demon. If in someway I can give life back to someone who was as good as Marcus Cole, maybe I can make up in a small way for the life taken when I brought Lucas back."

Lily made a soft sound, and Angel could see the sadness in her sister's green eyes.

"Oh, Angel. I thought you'd forgiven yourself, after Dureena forgave you?" asked Demon, sadly.

Angel swallowed the lump in her throat. "Not yet, but maybe if I can do this, it will be a step in the right direction."

Lily changed the subject, becoming practical. "OK, let's take a look at that spell, then you can tell Demon and me what your plan is. Do you have the spell with you now, or will you have to go to the ship to get it?"

Angel shook her head. "No, I know it off by heart. I'll write it out for you." She moved over to a table, and reaching for a piece of paper and a pen, beginning to write the spell down, while her sisters stood watching and waiting.

Angel straightened and stretched the muscles of her back. She glanced at the clock display on the wall, and was amazed to discover that two hours had passed, as Lily and Demon had gone over the life force spell, finally agreeing that it was safe.

Demon asked Angel to explain again how the spell worked. Angel advised them that they would merge with her through a binding spell, and would share a small fraction of their life force with her, to boost hers, making it stronger. She would then pass some of her life force onto Marcus, who would be further strengthened by the spell. All these factors combined would give Marcus enough life force to bring him back, without any of the sisters suffering or dying because of it.

Lily and Demon were dubious, concerned that there had to be some side effects to a spell so strong. Angel managed to convince them that they would all experience some weakness, but nothing that would last. Then Demon began firing questions at Angel, which much to her relief she was able to answer completely.

"Angel, just how do you propose getting past the night shift staff on duty in Medlab?"

Angel smiled. "Well, I did a bit of thinking about that one. Together, Lily and I can cast a 'time' spell. It will freeze time within Medlab. Everyone else will be affected by it, but not us. It will seem as if everyone in Medlab has been put on pause. It will only last a few minutes, which should be just long enough for us to get to the stasis chamber."

Demon turned to Lily, asking if she believed it would work. Angel couldn't stop the smile spreading across her face as Lily said, "I created it. I know it will work."

Demon snorted slightly, but was obviously satisfied. Then she turned back to Angel and asked, "What about being overheard, or caught carrying out the spell? We'd have an extremely hard time explaining what we were doing."

"The chamber is situated far back from the main section of the Medlab. It has a door that we can lock, and the spell won't make any sound. At least, nothing loud enough to draw any attention," explained

Angel.

Demon shook her head in amazement. "No wonder you were so quiet over lunch."

Angel gave her sister a sheepish grin. "I had a lot of thinking to do."

Demon considered carefully, obviously going over the plan in her mind, while Angel anxiously awaited her verdict. Finally, the tall blonde spoke. "Well, you've clearly thought everything through, and it does sound feasible, so..." she paused dramatically.

Angel forced herself to remain calm, and not to let her excitement show as she asked, "Does that mean the plan is a go?"

"Yes," Demon raised a hand to still Angel before she could start thanking her sisters. "One last question. What happens after we've revived Marcus? How do we explain to everyone how we brought him back, without revealing we used magic, and exposing who and what we really are?"

Angel hesitated. Demon had asked the one thing she hadn't yet been able to figure out. She decided to wing it. "If we get caught, which I seriously doubt, then we're from Eriadne. We know the technology found there better than anyone. I'll just explain that my medical knowledge enabled me to revive Marcus Cole."

Demon was about to open her mouth to say something, and Angel knew it would involve the word 'no'. She spoke quickly. "Please don't say 'no' just because of that one, tiny issue. I know that part of the plan isn't perfect, but we'll figure it out. Besides that, once Marcus is awake, I want you and Lily to leave. I'll be responsible. I'll convince them I knew some secret about the regenerators that enabled me to pull off something this fantastical."

Both Demon and Lily shook their heads. "We can't let you do that."

Angel cut them off with a wave of the hand. "It will be my responsibility." Her tone brooked no argument, and just for once Demon and Lily let her be. Not that Angel didn't think they wouldn't argue later. At least they were quiet for now.

Before her sisters could identify any more problems, Angel pushed them to consider how they would get away from their men in the small hours of the morning, without disturbing them and alerting them to what was going on.

"I don't know, Angel. I'm not too happy about deceiving Luke, John, and Matthew like that, or letting you cast a sleeping spell on them, so we can leave them to join you," said Lily, uncertainly.

"I have to agree with Lily, Angel. I'm not keen on lying to Matthew about this or sneaking around behind his back," added Demon. Angel knew that this was a serious obstacle to her elder sister. Demon never lied outright, and she wouldn't want to do so for the first time to her husband.

"I understand that, but you won't be lying. You'll go to bed as normal. When you leave, the men will remain sleeping, because of my spell. What they don't know, won't hurt them."

"That's lying by omission, Angel!" The way Demon said it, it was as if she'd never done anything like that before.

Angel decided to call her sister on the issue, as although Demon avoided lying outright, she often twisted the truth to her own ends, and allowed people to draw their own conclusions. "Like you've never done that before, Demon?" Demon's silence was answer enough.

"Just as I thought," said Angel. Then she continued, "I know you aren't happy about this part of the plan, but if Matthew or Luke knew what we were up to, they'd never let us do it. And I have to do this! All Matthew and Luke ever have to know was that I was involved. As this is my idea, I'll take whatever flack comes from it," finished Angel. Both sisters sighed. It was clear they knew they couldn't argue their sister out of this, so it was better to go along with her.

"All right. You've got two sisters to help you. Just make damned sure that the sleeping spell is strong enough to last until well after Lily and I get back to our quarters. If Matthew, Luke, or John wake to find us missing, we won't lie to them if they ask us where we have been," said Demon seriously.

Angel nodded. "I understand."

"Good." Demon stood up and looked at the clock. "Now Lily and I had better get going, before our men wonder where we are."

Lily stood and joined Demon as she walked to the door. "Will you be joining us for dinner and a walk around the Zocalo tonight?"

Angel shook her head. "No, I want to prepare myself and go over the spell again, so it's absolutely fixed in my head. Beside, I'm a bit nervous, and I'd never be able to look Matt or Luke in the eye. They'd notice that, and if they asked me what was wrong, well..." Angel gave her sister a rueful grin, "I couldn't lie to either of them either. So better to avoid them until the deed is done."

"What should we tell them about your absence?" Asked Demon.

"Just tell them I was tired, and decided to just spend a quiet night in," answered Angel, then she rushed on to add, "oh and please, Lily. If Luke wants to come and check on me because he's worried, stop him!"

Lily nodded, "I'll do my best."

Demon paused, frowning, then said reluctantly, "While you're going over your spells, see if you can come up with a sleeping spell that will work over on the Excalibur. That way you can make sure the children sleep through and we won't get any calls from the babysitters." A slow smile spread across the tall blonde's face. "And if you can make it work, I'll take details later. I could do with something that will keep Marcus asleep. You have no idea how often he's woken up at inconvenient moments."

Her smile turned lascivious, and her sisters laughed then quickly agreed to meet in the small hours of the morning, at least an hour before they would go to Medlab, so they could go over the plan again. With the time set, and after a group hug, Demon and Lily went to their quarters, leaving Angel to prepare herself for the night and morning ahead.

Day 2 : Angel's Room - 12:45am EST

Angel eyed the clock. When it read 12:45am, she closed her eyes and began the incantation for the sleep spell. It was a relatively uncomplicated spell to cast, but it took a little more concentration to focus it on

three people, in two separate locations. If she wasn't careful, the spell could disperse, resulting in Luke, Matthew and John not being the only ones affected by it.

Several minutes later, Angel had completed the spell. She linked with her sisters to inform them it was done, and that by the time they left their partners' sides, they wouldn't have to worry about disturbing them and waking them, as the men would be dead to the world.

Angel could tell by the tone of her sisters' 'voices' that they still weren't happy about having to go behind the men's backs, but both Lily and Demon said they'd see her in fifteen minutes. Angel thanked them, then sat down and waited, forcing herself to relax, telling herself to stop watching the clock, as it ticked closer to 1:00am.

Day 2 : Medlab - 2:30am EST

An hour and a half before, Lily and Demon had left their sleeping partners and joined Angel to go over and finalize the plan for reviving Marcus Cole. Everything was set, including an explanation for how it had been accomplished, using a Vorlon regenerator. Angel had remembered hearing Dr. Hobbes tell Luke that there was much about the regenerators' potential they had yet to uncover, and that for all they knew, the regenerators could do much more than the originally believed possible.

Going on that, Angel's explanation would be that she knew how to tap into the hidden potential of the regenerator to revive Marcus. Demon had been skeptical of this, but had finally agreed that although the idea wasn't flawless, it might be believed. The only real problem she could foresee was Angel being asked to reveal and demonstrate how she used the regenerator to accomplish something others had not yet been able to do.

Angel had said she'd refuse, stating it was far too dangerous, and that she herself would only have attempted it once. Demon, as far as she was aware, did not believe that Angel could be forced to show the doctors and scientists in Medlab how she'd done it. The worst that could happen was Angel being severely reprimanded for doing what she had done, without the authorization of Dr. Hobbes.

The plan had flaws, certainly. [But it just might work, and hopefully without me ending up in too much trouble,] thought Angel.

"Angel, do you think you could pay attention?" Demon's tone was hushed and impatient.

"Sorry, I was just going over the plan again, to make sure I had it all clear in my head," explained Angel apologetically.

"If you don't know it by now, we're in big trouble," said Demon tersely.

"I'm always in trou..." Angel's voice trailed off at the warning look she got from Demon. Now wasn't the time to smart mouth her sister. "Never mind," mumbled Angel. She then turned to Lily; it was time to stop lurking in the corridor and get the 'time' spell underway.

"You ready, Lily?"

Lily nodded and moved to stand facing Angel. Taking hold of each others' hands, the two sisters locked eyes. Focused on each other, Lily and Angel relied on Demon, who stood to one side, to keep a watch along

the corridor in case someone came by.

In unison, Angel and Lily began to speak the words of the spell in whispers. They worked their way through it methodically, using the Ancient language. Angel could feel the power of the words creating energy, which flowed and snapped back and forth, between their clasped hands. Their voices began to slow and hush, as the spell began to form a field of energy that was virtually invisible to the naked eye. It grew outward from where their hands joined, moving like a wave toward Medlab. As Lily and Angel spoke the final words, "Seal this place in time," the field shimmered for a brief moment, then vanished through the walls of Medlab. Inside, it settled around Medlab and its occupants, holding them frozen in a moment of time.

Angel and Lily let go of each others' hands and sighed, both a little shaken by the amount of energy and concentration it had taken to weave the spell.

Demon moved up beside them, and asked if they were all right. Both Angel and Lily nodded. Then Lily took a deep breath, and glancing at Medlab, she said quickly, "Let's go. The spell won't hold for long."

None of the sisters had chance for second thoughts as they advanced towards Medlab. The doors slid open and they rushed in. As they entered, all three stopped, as they saw the scene before them. Everyone inside was frozen in place, as if someone had activated a pause button.

Angel glanced around the room, her eyes resting on one nurse, who was frozen in mid action, as she attempted to catch a beaker filled with red liquid. The red liquid had already spilled out, and it hung in suspended animation above the ground. Even though Angel had helped Lily perform the time spell before and had seen its effects, it was still an incredible sight to see.

"Incredible," whispered Demon, echoing Angel's thoughts.

"Yes, it is, but we can't linger. Where's Marcus' chamber?" Asked Lily in a whisper, as she turned to Angel.

Angel pointed across Medlab to the corridor at the far end and said in a normal voice, "It's back there." She began moving toward it, having to skirt around a doctor who stood frozen in place.

Demon flinched, and said in a strangled whisper, "For god's sake, Angel, keep your voice down!"

"Why?" Asked Angel, as she glanced over her shoulder. "They can't hear us!"

"I'd still prefer you to lower your voice," shot Demon, still whispering.

"Sorry," whispered Angel, thankful that Demon was walking behind her and so couldn't see her rolling her eyes in exasperation.

Walking quickly, the sisters crossed Medlab. "Hurry," urged Lily desperately, "the spell will end soon."

"Relax, Lily, we're almost there," said Angel. From the dark look Demon gave her, she reckoned she must have spoken too loud for her sister's liking.

Ignoring the shake of Demon's head, Angel led them right to the end of the corridor. She stopped suddenly, as a trolley with life support equipment and a regenerator caught her eye. Behind her, Angel heard Lily

and Demon both grind out her name. Quickly, Angel grabbed the trolley and wheeled it in front of her, as she led her sisters along the corridor filled with cryo-chambers.

"What do you think you're doing with that?" Inquired Demon, as she eyed the trolley and equipment. From the way she had asked, anyone would have thought Demon believed Angel was stealing it.

"I'm just borrowing this. If we want my story to be believable, I better have a regenerator to hand. I'll need the life support equipment once we've got Marcus back, so I can monitor his vital signs," explained Angel.

"Good thinking," said Lily.

Angel gave her little sister a wry grin. "I just realized as I was passing that I should have this equipment handy," admitted Angel. It was probably something she shouldn't have admitted, if Demon's expression was anything to go by.

"At least I thought of it before we got inside the room and started everything," said Angel defensively. Demon was about to say something, but Angel was saved as they reached the end of the corridor and the sectioned off room. "This is it," said Angel, for the first time whispering for real.

"Not a moment too soon either," quipped Lily, as she cast a look back along the corridor. "Time has unfrozen back there."

Sure enough, Angel could hear the hum of life returning to Medlab, and a crash as the beaker hit the floor. Without another word between them, the sisters moved inside the room. The door was closed quietly, and locked behind them by Demon.

The three sisters stood in the cryo-chamber. Lily and Angel stood on opposite sides of Marcus Cole's capsule, facing each other, while Demon stood at the foot of it. Demon glanced at it, while the process of--for lack of a better word--'thawing' Marcus Cole took place. Only once it was complete, could the sisters start the spell. To Demon, it felt like it was taking forever.

"How much longer, Angel?" she inquired, a trace of impatience in her voice.

Angel quickly checked the control panel on the chamber. "Less than two minutes now."

While they continued to wait, Demon did some thinking, wondering how she had let Angel talk her and Lily into helping her with this insane idea. Demon wasn't one to rush into things, especially not before she had taken the time to really consider, but because the Excalibur could be called away on ISA business without warning at any time, it was now or never. The problem was that Angel's plan had more holes in it than Swiss cheese.

Demon had just discovered one more hole. Lily had linked with her and asked her how they planned to get out of Medlab, saying that they couldn't use the time spell again, as it wouldn't work a second time in the same location. Apparently, it was some kind of safety feature, to ensure people didn't abuse the spell. [Just perfect!] Angel must have known that, which begged the question, did Angel have another way out for her sisters? Angel certainly didn't want them to stick around, once Marcus had been brought back. Demon hoped for her sister's sake that she had just forgotten in all the excitement to mention she had an alternative exit planned. [Or I may just have to kill her.] The sound of the cryo-chamber beeping twice brought Demon's attention back from her thoughts.

"It's finished," said Angel, activating a small control. Demon watched, as the top canopy of the capsule divided and opened with a soft release of pressure. For the moment, Demon's need to discuss matters with Angel were forgotten, as all three sisters moved, leaning forward, to peer inside the chamber at the figure lying within.

"He's handsome, isn't he?" said Lily, softly.

[She's right. And he does share a name with my son. How could I resist helping him?] thought Demon.

"Just like Sleeping Beauty," whispered Angel.

Demon looked up at her sister. The expression on Angel's face was one of awe, mixed with sadness and hope. Demon knew in that moment that as flawed as the plan may be, helping Angel had been the right decision. It might just help to heal some of her sister's wounds. However, Demon knew there was a problem that had to be dealt with, before they could go any further. "Angel, before we go any further, there's one thing Lily and I need to know."

Angel frowned slightly, "What is it, Demon?"

Demon quickly explained her concerns, "So if you want Lily and I to leave, I certainly hope you have an alternative means of us getting us out of here, because we can't just waltz back through Medlab and use the front door."

Demon had to resist the urge to strangle her sister, when Angel responded in a matter of fact tone of voice, "Of course I have another way for you two to get out."

"How?" asked Lily.

Angel pointed past Lily to the back of the room. "There's an old access hatch back there, used for maintenance purposes. It leads out to a corridor that runs along the back of Medlab and eventually exits to a maintenance conduit. The conduit will take you to another passageway, beside the elevator we used to get to this section," Angel paused, as she became aware of the looks her sisters were giving her. "What? You thought I didn't have a way out for you? While you and Lily were in bed, I was researching alternatives, as I knew we couldn't use the time spell again."

Demon took a deep breath to calm herself before she spoke. "Why the hell didn't you tell us this before? And why, if you knew about the access panel, did we come in the way we did? We could have just come in the back way," said Demon, through clenched teeth.

"Well, firstly you didn't ask, and secondly, yes, I knew about the panel, but I didn't know exactly where it was. On the plans I found--ones that I didn't need a security code clearance for--it didn't give the exact location, as the hatch is no longer used. I didn't want to get here and find it wasn't in this room. Now I see it's here, so all I'll have to do is use my telekinesis to get it open, and you and Lily can use it to get out," explained Angel.

"And pray tell, Angel, what would your plan have been, if the access hatch hadn't been in this room?" ground out Demon.

"That doesn't really matter now, does it? The hatch is in this room, so no need to worry about what ifs,"

said Angel, looking pleased with herself.

[When this is over, I'm going to kill her. SLOWLY,] decided Demon. She was about to give her sister a tongue-lashing, but was interrupted by Lily, who cut her off before she could start.

"Angel, you could have at least told us, and warned us about what might have been a very big problem for us," chastised Lily softly.

Angel face flushed with guilt. "Look, I'm sorry. I know I should have said something. It's just I got caught up in all of this."

As mad as she was with her sister, Demon couldn't stay angry with her, not when Angel was sorry. Demon sighed and shook her head indulgently. "If Lily and I didn't love you and know how much this means to you, Angel, we'd call this off right now. But we've come this far, and as long as you're sure about being able to get us out this way..."

"I'm absolutely positive. While we were waiting for Marcus to 'thaw', I tested it out. The hatch is pretty tightly shut, but it will move with a little effort." said Angel with conviction.

"All right," nodded Demon. "I believe you." She paused and looked at Marcus. "Now, we'd better stop standing about like this. We're taking way too long. Let's get this over with, before we all get caught in here!" [And discover any more problems that delays us further!]

Angel let out an audible sigh of relief, and looked at her sisters gratefully, "Thank you, and I promise next time I'll be sure to plan things better."

"There won't be next time," said Lily and Demon.

Angel gave her sisters a teasing grin. "I'm kidding."

With a scowl from both Lily and Demon, the sisters took up their previous positions. This time Lily took hold of Demon's hand. Demon reached out and took hold of Angel's hand firmly, while Angel raised her free hand and placed it upon the center of Marcus' chest.

Angel looked from one sister to the other. "Ready?"

Demon and Lily nodded. "Ready."

"Then let's do it."

An aura of white-blue light enveloped the sisters and the cryo-chamber. All three of the witches spoke the words of Angel's spell, their voices merging slightly as they completed the first part, which would bind them together physically. That part of the spell complete, they moved onto the transfer of some of their life force into Angel.

Lily and Demon began speaking the next part of the spell. As they spoke in unison, the aura around them began to change and shift, glowing whiter. From the center of Lily's chest, a white, shifting glow began to spread outward, moving down her arm toward the hand that held Demon's. It passed over to Demon and spread up her arm toward her chest.

For a moment, Demon gasped, as the energy from Lily passed into her, then she relaxed, continuing to speak the words of the incantation. Moments later, a now brighter white glow emerged from her, and moved down to the hand that held Angel's. As it moved down Demon's arm, Angel began to chant. Her words were different, as she prepared to receive the life force they were sharing with her.

The white energy traveled up Angel's arm, and grew to surround her in a white haze, then disappeared as it was absorbed into her body. Her eyes suddenly glowed with an unnatural light, which got whiter and brighter as she continued the spell. The energy spread out around her, then moved down her arm to the hand that rested on Marcus' chest. For a moment, his body glowed and shimmered, as the light surrounded him. Then it grew almost blindingly bright, before Angel's final words. The light vanished into the prone body. There was a long pause before the sisters let each others' hands go. All of them were shaken, a fine sheen of sweat covering their brows and upper lips.

"Well, that would have been easier with Ilas here," said Demon, her voice audibly shaken and weak.

Lily cleared her throat and gave a weak laugh, "True. We've shared many things before, but never this." For a moment, Lily teetered and Demon reached out to steady her.

"You OK?" asked Demon, with concern.

Lily nodded, "Yes. Just a little weak, but I'll be fine. What about you?"

"The same," said Demon, turning to Angel, who was standing unmoving as she stared down at Marcus. She looked terribly pale, and Demon moved around to place a hand on her sister's arm.

"Angel, are you OK?"

Angel looked up. For a moment, her eyes were unfocused, then she blinked and took in a deep shaky breath as she nodded. "That was a rush!"

Demon didn't know whether to laugh or hug her sister, so she did both. "It was An odd experience, that's for sure."

Angel pulled away, laughing. "That's one way to put it. Now, let's see if it worked." She turned her attention back to Marcus, and reached out to take his pulse, her face falling instantly.

"What is it?" asked Lily.

"There's no pulse!" Angel's voice was filled with panic as she drew her hand away. She was suddenly beset with doubts. What if the spell didn't work in practice? What if Marcus had been dead and frozen too long? She told herself to not be stupid, Lucas Buck had been gone much longer than Marcus, and hadn't had a body when she'd brought him back.

Angel could feel her sisters' eyes on her, and she knew what they were thinking. If this had all been for nothing... No, it wasn't. Marcus Cole had to live! Angel reached out her hand and tried to find a pulse again. Maybe she had missed the pulse point, in her shaken state. Suddenly, Marcus let out a gasp, his body jerking as life returned to it. Angel jumped, her heart racing as he gasped again, then his body stilled, his chest rising slightly as he breathed. She recovered from her surprise and reached to take his pulse. This time it was there--weak, but it was there.

Angel moved quickly. Reaching for the life support equipment, she hooked Marcus up to it. She knew she would need to get Marcus onto IV fluids, but for the moment the most important thing was to take his vitals. They were weak and thready, but reasonably steady, at least, for someone who had been dead a short time ago. The young witch turned to her sisters, who were watching in amazement, both obviously awed by the fact that the spell had worked, but clearly elated. She moved toward them and felt their arms come around her as they hugged her.

"You did it, Angel. It worked," said Demon against her hair. Angel pulled back to grin broadly at her sisters.

"We did it, Demon. You, me and Lily, I couldn't have done this without you!" She hugged both her sisters again. "Thank you!"

"You're welcome," said Lily, as they finally broke apart. "We're happy it worked. We know how much this meant to you."

Angel smiled gratefully, "More than anything has in a long time." She paused to look down at Marcus. "Now Marcus Cole has a second chance at life," she finished, happily.

"And so do you, Angel." Angel nodded at Demon.

"Yes I do, but that will only be certain once Marcus is well and truly back in the land of the living." Angel moved toward the access hatch at the back of the room. "But for that to happen, I'm going to have to get him out of here, and get him the care he needs. That means letting Medlab know what has happened here, and letting the doctors take care of him..." she trailed off as she looked at her sisters pointedly.

Demon snorted and turned to Lily, "I think that's a hint that Angel wants us to leave now, don't you?"

Lily sighed and shook her head. "Such gratitude. We share our life force with her, and help her bring a dead man back to life. Now that it's all done, we're no longer needed. I feel so used."

Angel could see the corners of Lily's lips twitching, telling her that her sisters were teasing her. "Funny sisters. Look, I can't wait too long to get Marcus the care he needs, and I want you out of here, so no one discovers your participation in this."

Both Lily and Demon laughed softly, and walked towards Angel. "OK, we know," said Demon. "But I'm still not happy about leaving you behind like this."

Angel cut her sister off, "Demon, you and Lily have families, and children who need their mothers. If the worst happens and someone ends up in the brig for this, I'd rather it was me. This was my idea, therefore my responsibility, and I don't want the guilt of you both being in trouble with me. So please, no arguments, ifs or buts." Angel turned to focus on the access panel, not giving her sisters a chance to argue.

She went to work with her power. The hatch creaked and groaned, but thankfully it opened without much effort. Angel stuck her head through the hole, to look down the conduit. It was small, dim, and dirty from a long period of disuse. [Always amazes me that even in space there's dust,] thought Angel, but at least it was a way out where her sisters wouldn't be seen.

"OK, time to go," said Angel, turning back to her sisters.

Lily was the first to move toward the hatch. She looked as unhappy about leaving as Demon, but she didn't argue. Angel watched as Lily stuck her head through the opening. She moved back so quickly that she almost stepped back into Demon, who managed to move out of the way just in time to prevent her toes being trodden on.

"Not a chance!" said Lily, shaking her head and looking mulishly at Angel.

"What's wrong now?" inquired Demon

"Take a look," said Lily, pointing at the open hatch.

Angel watched, as Demon did as Lily asked. Demon stuck her head through, her voice slightly disembodied as she asked. "It's a little dark and dirty," Demon pulled her head back up and turned to Lily, "but you've never been a prissy little thing, afraid of the dark, or a little dirt, so what?"

Lily snorted and ignored Demon's question, instead turning to Angel. "You must have known how tight it would be to go through a maintenance conduit like that, and you said nothing to me?"

Demon and Angel cast looks at each other, then Angel answered, "I didn't think it mattered. I knew that it would be wide enough for Demon, so it wouldn't be small enough to upset you."

"It's not the tight space, Angel! You could have warned me. I would have worn something more practical than this," said Lily, indicating her floor length, green velvet skirt. "How do you expect me to crawl in a narrow space dressed like this?"

Angel stared opened mouthed at her sister, "You have got to be kidding me! You're holding me up because of the way you're dressed? Goddess knows you're the only person I know who would wear a floor length skirt on a clandestine mission like this. Why the hell did you wear it? So if Marcus woke up and he gave you a kiss you'd be looking your best? Hike it up around your waist, take it off, whatever! I don't care what you do, but get your tiny little red-headed ass through that hatch!" Angel knew she shouldn't have snapped like that, but she was worried about Marcus. She could hear the sound of the monitors, indicating his heart rate and pulse were slowing. She didn't need this right now.

"Demon, don't you laugh, this is not funny! Angel, don't you dare get snappy with me. It's a logical concern," said Lily angrily. Angel tried to look contrite as she apologized to her little sister.

"Look, Lily, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap, but how you're dressed right now is the least of my concerns. You'll manage somehow, I know you will, but please get through there now. I really need to get back to Marcus." Angel's voice was filled with desperation now.

Demon cleared her throat, "Come on, Lily. Just hike the skirt up and let's get going. Angel still has work to do." Angel smiled gratefully at her sister.

Lily sighed but without another word grabbed her skirt and began bunching it around her waist.

"Thank you," said Angel, walking up to her sister to give her a hug.

Lily returned it saying against Angel's shoulder, "If the skirt is ruined, you'll owe me a new one."

Angel couldn't help but laugh and said she would with pleasure. More importantly, she told Lily that even if her skirt wasn't ruined, she'd still buy Lily a pair of pants more suitably for skulking in. The sisters broke apart and Angel helped Lily to get through the hatch. Once Lily was through, with a few undignified words, Angel turned to Demon.

"Your turn."

Demon approached the hatch, but before she climbed through it, she also hugged her sister. "Good luck."

Angel smiled at her sister with appreciation. "Thank you, for what you both did today," said Angel with meaning. Demon nodded and Angel could hear Lily's response from the conduit, then she stood back and watched, as Demon climbed through. With her longer legs, it was a little easier for her to get up, over and through to the other end. Once Demon was through, Angel told them to keep going to the left, until they reached the end of the conduit. From there it would be easy to see where they were and where to go.

Before Angel could close the hatch, Demon told her to let them know as soon as it was over and what had happened. Angel assured them they'd be the first to know, one way or the other. The sisters then began to move down the conduit, with Demon lecturing Lily on how she should consider wearing more practical clothing. Angel smiled, as Lily told her big sister to shut up, then she quickly closed the hatch and turned to look at Marcus.

As she did so, the life support monitor started beeping in warning, as Marcus Cole's heart rate began to drop dangerously low. Angel rushed forward, a sick feeling in her stomach, as she knew what the monitor was indicating. Marcus was about to flat line.

"Shit!" The room was suddenly filled with a high-pitched alarm. Angel had totally forgotten about the machine's built in warning to notify medical staff that a patient was in trouble. She had hoped to get Marcus wheeled through to Medlab, to control how the doctors and nursing staff found out about his revival, but that was blown out of the water. There was no way the staff back up the corridor wouldn't have heard the alarm. Angel knew that any minute there would be doctors and nurses heading her way. Using her telekinesis, she quickly unlocked the door. She may not have wanted their help this way, but she needed it, and they had to be able to get in.

Angel switched off the alarm, then she began to give Marcus CPR. She had to keep him breathing and get his heart going again. As she worked on him, she questioned the success of the spell. It had brought him back, but had enough life force been given to him to keep him alive? Angel wasn't given the chance to think about the answer, as she was interrupted by a harsh voice behind her.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Day 2 : Angel's Room - 5:25am EST

Angel sat on the bed in her quarters, staring at still shaking hands. She had been sitting like that since her return from Medlab ten minutes ago, replaying everything that had happened after she'd been discovered with Marcus. She was still shaken by how fast things had moved from that moment

"What the hell is going on here?" asked Dr. Hobbes, as she marched up to Angel, who was still feverishly

pressing up and down on Marcus' chest, trying to get his heart beating again.

Angel ignored the stunned and even angry expression on Hobbes' face. "Please, help me! We have to get him defibrillated."

Hobbes stood unmoving, as Angel stopped the chest compressions and moved to give Marcus mouth to mouth. When she had given him the required breaths, she went back to the compressions. Hobbes' inaction angered Angel. [What the hell is she waiting for?]

"For god's sake, Dr. Hobbes, help me before he dies!" Angel's tone seemed to snap Hobbes out of whatever state she was in, because she suddenly became the efficient doctor Angel knew her to be. She called out orders to the two nurses who had arrived with her. They rushed forward and Angel felt herself being pulled away from Marcus. She was told by Dr. Hobbes to stand back and out of the way. One of the nurses continued chest compressions and the other did mouth to mouth. Dr. Hobbes checked the monitor and his pulse, obviously not happy with what she saw.

"Let's get him out of here, STAT!" ordered Hobbes. Without hesitation, the nurses swung into action. One of them grabbed a gurney that was beside the wall. She pushed it up beside the cryo-chamber, then together, Dr. Hobbes and the two nurses lifted Marcus out of the chamber and onto the gurney. Before the other nurse covered Marcus with a blanket, Angel got a brief glimpse of his left wrist, discolored with bruising all the way around. Angel wondered if that had been caused by the alien healing apparatus he'd been attached to before his death. She didn't have time to dwell on that thought, as she was forced to move quickly or get run over. The nurses, gurney and Dr. Hobbes flew past her and back up the corridor. There was only one thing Angel could do. She followed.

As the group burst from the corridor, Dr. Hobbes yelled for another Doctor, who rushed to her side, along with another nurse. Angel stood back, watching as EKG nodes were attached to Marcus by one nurse, while another prepared and inserted an IV needle into his arm, rapidly infusing saline solution into his body to rehydrate him. The chest compressions continued, as Marcus was intubated, to get him breathing. A defibrillator was brought in and Dr. Hobbes activated it. Ordering everyone to stand clear, she applied the paddles to Marcus' chest. A jolt of electricity surged through his body. Angel jumped as he jerked and spasmed. She could taste blood from where she was biting down on her lip, waiting tensely for the sound of a heartbeat from the EKG monitor.

It took three tries with increased voltage from the defibrillator, but finally the EKG began a slow rhythmic beat, as Marcus' heart began to pump blood on its own. Angel almost collapsed with relief, as a nurse called out the readings to Dr. Hobbes--they were stabilizing. The nurse who had been monitoring the breathing apparatus informed the two doctors that Marcus was now breathing on his own. Dr. Hobbes quietly instructed the nurse to remove the ventilator, as she watched her patient closely. She then turned to the other doctor and instructed him to administer 20mg of Vorlamine intravenously. Angel recognized the drug as one of the new ones developed by Dr. Hobbes from the Eriadne Vorlon technology. The other doctor complied, and within seconds of it entering Marcus' blood stream, his vitals got even stronger, as he began to stabilize.

Angel moved a little closer to watch the monitors, to assure herself that Marcus was indeed improving. The medical team continued to work on the Ranger, but at a less frenetic pace, now the patient was out of danger. All Angel could think was, [He's going to be all right.] There had been moments when she had believed he would die, and that the spell had been a failure. Not any more. Now she knew it had worked, maybe not alone, but it had worked, and her relief was enormous.

Now the immediate emergency was over, Angel became aware of the occasional curious glance from the nurses and the other doctor. It was clear they were wondering who she was, and what part she played in the recent crisis. Those glances made Angel all too aware that she would soon have to explain herself, and what had happened. She wasn't looking forward to that, and the urge to turn and leave while Dr. Hobbes' attention was diverted elsewhere was great, but Angel had made the decision long before this moment to stand and take responsibility for her actions. The glances ended, as Dr. Hobbes instructed the doctor to take Marcus into an ICU cubicle. Angel made a move to follow, but was stopped by Hobbes.

"You stay right there, Ms. Denier. I don't want you near my patient." Her tone was cold. Angel couldn't blame her.

"I just want to be sure he'll be OK," explained Angel softly.

Hobbes ignored Angel, as she instructed the other doctor to go ahead and keep a close eye on Marcus. Only then did she turn back to Angel, her voice controlled as she spoke. "That is my first priority, to make sure Mr. Cole is going to be OK. I have no idea how it's possible that he's alive right now..." Dr. Hobbes paused to give Angel a look that made the young witch squirm uncomfortably. "And you'll be answering for that in due course, Ms Denier. Right now, I have to take care of Mr. Cole, and make sure no permanent damage has been done to him by whatever actions you took to revive him."

"I can explain..." began Angel, but Hobbes cut her off.

"And you will, Ms. Denier, but later." Hobbes glanced towards a Medlab Security officer.

Angel's heart sank. [Here it comes.]

"I'm sorely tempted to have Security take you to the brig and hold you there until I'm ready to deal with you. But considering the remarkable and highly unusual circumstances of what has happened here this morning, and the fact that I'm clueless as to whether you have actually done anything illegal-apart from being in Medlab unauthorized and doing what you did without permission from myself-I'm going to ask you to return to your quarters until I have got things sorted out here. When I'm ready, I'll have someone come and bring you back here. Can I trust you do go back to your quarters and stay there until you're called?" asked Hobbes.

Returning to her quarters was the last thing Angel wanted. She wanted to stay right here until Marcus was conscious. "I'd much rather stay here, Dr. Hobbes, and wait. I won't get in the..."

"Don't push your luck, Ms Denier." Hobbes cut in. "You're lucky I don't have you arrested on the spot. Now please, leave my Medlab." Her tone brooked no argument and Angel knew if she pushed, Hobbes wouldn't think twice about having her arrested. She nodded.

"Good," said Hobbes, but before she turned to walk away she added, "Just be aware Ms Denier, that I am not letting you off lightly here. You'll be held accountable for Marcus Cole and I'll be demanding to know what you did and how you managed to bring him back from the dead."

Angel nodded again. "I understand."

Dr. Hobbes sighed. "And one last thing Ms Denier, I hope I can trust you to not try and leave the station?"

That wasn't even a consideration for Angel. Even if it had been, there was no place she could run to. She

certainly couldn't hide up on the Excalibur. Hobbes knew she was from there, and the only alternative was the last place Angel ever wanted to go back to. Downbelow. Besides, Angel wasn't going to run from her responsibilities. "You have my word, Dr. Hobbes. I'll be in my quarters."

Hobbes scrutinized Angel for a moment then nodded. "I'm glad to hear that, Ms. Denier. Now if you'll excuse me." With that, she turned away and Angel watched as she joined the other doctor by Marcus' bedside. Angel stood watching, unable to move, but when Hobbes looked up and frowned, Angel turned and quickly left Medlab.

When she'd returned to her rooms, Angel's nerves were in pieces. She managed to link with her sisters, knowing they'd be worried until they heard from her. Demon and Lily had been relieved to hear Marcus was alive, but they were upset about what had followed. Angel had tried to explain calmly, even though she felt anything but calm, that she had expected to be caught and now all she could do was wait to find out what would happen next.

Demon had said she was coming right over and so had Lily, but Angel had quickly told them not to. She told them she was fine but completely exhausted and intended to get a little sleep, before she was called back to Medlab to face the music.

Before they broke the link, Demon had insisted that if things got bad, she was to link with them, and they would come to help, in whatever manner they could. Angel thanked them, saying her explanation should save her from any real trouble. Then Demon and Lily told Angel they loved her, and reassured her that she had done the right thing, before finally saying goodbye with a mental hug.

Her sisters had said she'd done the right thing. [Then why am I questioning it?] Angel shook her head. That thought stemmed from the fact that she was freaked out and afraid. To say she was willing to pay the consequences was one thing, but the thoughts of what could happen—like arrest—made it a lot easier said than done. Angel had been jailed once in her life, and she didn't want to experience that again. [Gods, please let my regenerator explanation and reasons be believed,] she prayed to whichever gods were listening.

Angel let out a long heavy sigh and stood up to remove her leather pants and T-shirt. Wearing only a bra and panties, she climbed onto the bed and curled up. Reaching for the pillow, she held it against her chest, hugging it to her. Angel was too exhausted to linger on thoughts of Marcus, Dr. Hobbes, jail or what reaction she would get from Luke, Matthew and John, but especially the former two, when they eventually learned what she had done. All thoughts were washed away as the sleep claimed her and carried her away, freeing her for the moment from fear, nerves, doubts and wonderings.

Day 2 : Angel's Room - 7:05am EST

Angel was woken from a deep sleep by the sound of the door buzzer shrieking relentlessly. Despite a lack of sleep, and still feeling exhausted, Angel was awake instantly. Her throat went dry, and she lay on the bed unable to move, as she was gripped with nerves. Angel jumped as the buzzer sounded again. She knew she couldn't ignore it.

"I'm coming," she called, as she moved off the bed. She quickly put on a robe, before moving through to the living room. When she was standing in front of the door, she called for it to open. Angel gasped in

surprise when she saw who was standing there. He was the last person she was expecting.

"Matt!"

Without acknowledging her, Gideon walked into the room, then kept his back to her. Angel swallowed, suddenly extremely nervous. "Matt, is something wrong?"

Gideon turned around, his expression not giving anything away. It was what she saw in his eyes, which were dark and furious, and the movement of his jaw as it clenched and unclenched, which caused Angel's heart to drop to her feet.

He looked Angel up and down then said, "Get dressed" Gideon didn't yell it, he just spoke softly, which was infinitely more unnerving.

"Matt, I..." began Angel.

"Now," ordered Gideon, even more softly.

That soft voice and the look in Gideon's eyes were enough to get Angel moving. He was angrier than she had ever seen him before, and it scared her. She knew that somehow Gideon had learned of what she had done, and now it was time to face the music. Angel turned and ran into the bedroom.

She emerged ten minutes later, fully dressed. She had considered barricading herself in her room, but she knew Gideon would have eventually gotten to her, even if it had meant tearing the door down with his bare hands. She had decided not to antagonize someone who she knew to be in a foul mood already. So plucking up all the courage she had, Angel joined him in the living room. Gideon didn't turn as she entered. Instead, he moved towards the door, saying quietly, "Follow me."

"Where are we going?" asked Angel. As soon as the question was out, she knew she shouldn't have asked. Gideon stopped, spun around and stalked towards her. She flinched as he grabbed her arm. Ignoring her demand that he let her go, Gideon dragged Angel out of her quarters, without saying another word.

Day 2 : Demon and Gideon's Room - 07:23am EST

"What the hell did you think you were doing, Angel?" demanded Gideon angrily, as he stood, hands on hips and with fire in his eyes, glaring down at her.

Angel swallowed nervously. "What are you talking about, Matt?" She instantly regretted her attempt at innocence, as a dark expression clouded Gideon's face and it looked as if he would happily strangle her, then shove her remains out of an airlock.

Gideon stalked right up to her. He was so close Angel could feel the warmth of his breath on her face, as he ground out, "Oh really?" He locked eyes with her, and she tried to outstare him, but there was so much anger in them that within seconds she had to look away, and stare down at her feet. "Just as I thought," he snorted. At the smug note in his voice, Angel's head snapped up, and her own temper began to bristle.

Before she could respond, she heard Demon's voice in her head. [Please, Angel, don't...] Angel glanced at her sister, standing beside her. Demon's face was etched with worry, and there was an almost pleading expression in her eyes, as she wordlessly asked Angel not to lose her temper. Angel could see the same look

in Lily's eyes, from where she stood on the other side of Demon. For the moment, Angel reined in her anger and turned her attention back to watch the Captain, as he paced up and down in front her. He reminded Angel of a caged lion prowling back and forth. She wanted to ask how he knew about what had happened, but she decided it was best to leave that alone for now.

As she stood there, waiting for Gideon to stop pacing and start yelling, Angel became aware of Luke's eyes watching her from where he stood with Lily. Angel shifted nervously, and she began to fidget uncomfortably under Luke's scrutiny. She knew if she looked directly at him, she would see the disappointment in his eyes, and for some reason that was harder to face than Gideon's wrath. Angel was grateful that John wasn't there, too, condemning her with his look. She could only guess he had stayed with Naima.

Gideon stopped pacing and began yelling about how he had been woken from a wonderful sleep by an irate Captain Marriot. His old friend had advised the Captain that Dr. Hobbes had discovered a serious incident in Medlab, involving Gideon's sister-in-law and the revival of one Marcus Cole.

"Funny how it doesn't surprise me that yet again you're in the middle of a mess that I have to clear up. I had to do a lot of fast talking to persuade Marriot not to send Security down here, to haul your ass off to the brig." Angel winced at the almost malicious way Gideon looked at her.

"Matthew," Demon interrupted before Angel could find the words to respond.

"No, not now. I'm going to finish what I have to say." Gideon spoke a lot more softly to his wife, but his tone was a clear warning. To Angel's surprise, Demon backed off. [Oh god!] thought Angel, if her sister was backing off...

Angel's attention was brought back to the Captain, as he spoke pointedly to her. "I was appalled when I asked Deborah if she knew anything about what had happened in Medlab. She admitted that she not only knew about it, but that she and Lily had helped you bring Marcus Cole back to life, using some sort of 'magic' spell." Angel quickly opened her mouth, desperate to explain, but he cut her off. "Don't try to explain it to me Angel. You and I will talk about that soon enough. Right now all I care about is the fact that you involved your sisters in this."

Angel felt Demon take her hand, and she pulled her attention away from Gideon's glare to look up at her older sister. "I'm so sorry, Angel. I couldn't lie to him, and neither could Lily lie to Luke and John when they asked her about it."

Squeezing Demon's hand, Angel smiled understandingly at her sisters. "I know and I don't blame either of you."

"No, you shouldn't, because unlike some, your sisters know the value and importance of honesty," said Gideon, looking at Angel pointedly.

"I did not lie to you, Captain!" she responded defensively.

"Well, maybe not technically, but doing something you know you shouldn't, behind the backs of people who you say you care about, is just as bad as lying, Angel." Gideon spoke softly, but venomously.

His words hurt Angel, and she couldn't stop herself fighting back. Squaring her shoulders, she looked Gideon boldly in the eyes. "If I didn't say anything to you, Captain, it was because I knew you wouldn't

listen to me. You'd have stopped me from doing something I ~~had~~ to do."

Angel could see the veins in Gideon's forehead stand out, as he clenched his jaw. "Had to do? Why did you have to do what you did? You don't even know Marcus Cole! Why the hell would it be so damned important to you to risk your safety and that of your sisters, by doing something as monumentally stupid as sneaking into Medlab and using magic to revive a dead man?"

"Matthew, Angel..." began Demon, but neither Angel nor Gideon registered her low voice trying to soothe them, as they escalated their confrontation.

"I don't consider bringing someone back to life--someone who shouldn't have been dead in the first place--monumentally stupid!" argued Angel.

Gideon's expression was far too calm for her liking, as he responded questioningly, "Even if it was dangerous?"

Angel sighed, "Yes, there was a risk that it might not have worked and that..."

"I'm not talking about the fucking spell, Angel!" interrupted Gideon angrily. "I'm talking about putting yourself, your sisters and this entire family at risk," he said accusingly.

Angel felt gutted by what he was implying, and for a moment she was unable to speak, but finally she found her voice, which cracked as she said, "I didn't put them or this family at risk. I made sure I was the only one around at the end. Dr. Hobbes has no idea about their involvement and never will. I'm going to take full and sole responsibility for what I did."

"Oh, that's rich coming from you! Taking responsibility," laughed Gideon dryly.

"Matthew, stop it, that's not fair!" This time, both Angel and Gideon heard Demon's voice as she stepped in to stop the argument.

Once again, before she could go further, Gideon cut her off. This time his annoyance showed. "Deborah, stay out of this!"

If Angel hadn't been angry with Gideon, she might have felt sorry for him. He was stepping on to thin ice talking to Demon that way. However, instead of stripping the skin from Gideon's body, Demon just said quietly, "Just stay calm, both of you, before this gets out of hand,"

It was apparent that Gideon wasn't going to pay any heed to Demon's warning, as he continued his verbal assault on Angel. "Tell me this, Angel. Did you for one moment stop to consider what would have happened if Deborah and Lily had been caught with you performing the spell? What would have happened to all three of you and this family?"

Angel felt like screaming, but managed to reply calmly "We weren't caught, so that point is moot..."

"God damn you, you stupid, stupid girl, the point is far from moot! You ~~were~~ caught and now you're going to have to face Hobbes and Marriot, and explain to them how you brought Marcus Cole back from the dead! What are you going to tell them? 'Oh, I just cast a little spell and hey presto the dead man is now walking?'" asked Gideon, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"No, I have..." began Angel, but Gideon interrupted her again.

"Shut up, Angel! Right now, I don't really want to know how you plan to explain it. What I'm trying to get at, but you're obviously too obtuse to understand, is you put your sisters in danger. By getting caught, there's a risk of exposing who and what you are. Do you know what would happen then, Angel? You, your sisters and the children could be taken away to be tested and experimented on, to find out what you really are. Luke, John and I wouldn't be able to stop it, or to rescue any of you, because we'd all be in jail for having falsified your records!"

Angel felt the color drain from her face at the implications of his words. Worse, she could see he believed she hadn't considered that. Gideon must have thought her silence was due to guilt, because he smiled at her cruelly. "Of course, you didn't consider that, did you? Because just as always, you acted selfishly. You did what you wanted, without giving a damn about the consequences! I thought over the years you had changed. How wrong I was!"

"You son of a bitch!" yelled Angel, devastated by what Gideon had said. "How dare you say that? I did not act selfishly. I wanted to help someone!" She was too far gone in anger to think about what she was saying, "I hate you, you bastard! Is it any wonder I don't confide in you, when I knew you would just accuse me of being selfish? That I'd be forced to face the I-never-do-wrong-or-lie Saint Matthew Gideon as judge and jury for the crime of doing something I felt to be right!"

"You do whatever the hell you please, Angel, for whatever stupid reason, and everyone else be damned!" Gideon shot back at her, his eyes flashing with anger.

"You self-righteous bastard! God forbid you should ever do anything wrong. The day you do, I swear I'll pay for a first class ticket to watch you be judged as harshly and unfairly as you always judge me, and I'll relish every moment of it!" shot Angel, anger driving her to fight back. "I'll even volunteer to be a character witness for the prosecution!"

"That's enough!" This time Demon yelled at them. Both Gideon's and Angel's heads jerked in her direction, as Demon moved forward and stood between them. Demon rarely raised her voice and it surprised them both into silence. The tall blonde looked from one to the other. "What the hell are you two doing? Do you want to end up saying something that can't be taken back?" When neither of them answered, Demon continued more quietly, "This situation is serious enough, without you losing your heads and attacking each other. So no more!" Her tone brooked no argument. Both Gideon and Angel shot dark looks at each other, but neither said anything. "Now, both of you are going to listen to me," said Demon calmly, before turning her attention to her husband.

Gideon spoke before Demon could continue. "Deborah, stay out of this. Angel has to be made aware of how serious things are. Let me deal with this."

Demon's face fell, and Angel could see tears in her eyes as she looked at her husband. "Please, Matthew. Don't be like this. You and Angel are dangerously close to saying things that could hurt beyond any hope of repair. Please, don't let that happen, or it will surely split this whole family apart. Listen to me, please, I'm begging you."

Angel watched, as a confused expression flickered across Gideon's face and he looked at Demon in surprise. Angel knew what he was thinking. Demon had just begged him for something, and the concept of Demon begging for anything was as alien to him as it was to Angel. It worked, because Gideon cleared his throat

and said gently, "OK, I'm listening."

Demon gave him a grateful smile before addressing him seriously, "Thank you, darling. Angel is right. You had no right to call her actions selfish, not when you don't have all the facts as to why she did it. Lily and I willingly helped her revive Marcus Cole, because we both thought it was the right thing to do. Yes, there's a risk of us being exposed, but I trust Angel to give a suitable explanation, a believable one, as to how she managed to bring Marcus back to life. This family will be safe. Lily and I wouldn't have helped Angel, if we didn't believe that."

For the first time, Gideon stood silently, but Angel could see him chewing over in his mind what Demon had said, trying to decide if his wife was just trying to protect her sister.

"Angel. Lily and I asked you not to lose your temper, but you always let Matthew get to you." Demon held up her hand to stop Angel, as she tried to defend her actions. "I know why you got angry, and I understand. But you have to understand Matthew's reasons. He's afraid, Angel, afraid of losing us. So don't react harshly, and don't say things you don't mean," she finished gently.

Angel lowered her eyes for a moment, knowing that Demon was referring to her saying she hated Gideon. Well, maybe it wasn't true all the time, but she'd meant it at that moment. He'd hurt her and she'd hated him for that. Angel could feel Demon watching her closely, waiting for some kind of acknowledgment that she understood. Angel nodded. "Fine, I understand."

Demon sighed, clearly not happy with that response, but deciding to leave it there for the moment, as she looked from her sister to her husband. "Look, the situation is serious, no one is going to deny that, but the two of you butting heads is only going to make things worse. If you carry on like this, you're going to say things that neither of you can take back. Please, I don't want that. I couldn't bear it if my sister and husband became enemies. I love you both too much for that. Please remain calm, and get this problem sorted out."

To her dismay, Angel could see tears in Demon's eyes, and it hit her just how badly her fighting with Gideon had affected her sister. Matthew must have seen the tears, too, because he took Demon in his arms and hugged her, kissing her forehead. He quietly assured Demon that he would try to stay calm. His words would have set Angel's mind at ease, if she'd not seen the cold look he gave her. Angel tensed and returned the look.

The Captain let go of Demon and said, "If I'm being asked to remain calm, I think I have a right to know what Angel's reason was for doing this."

Thankfully Demon answered, as Angel didn't trust herself yet to respond reasonably. "We'll explain that in a moment, Matthew. Right now, the most important thing is what's going to happen next?"

For a moment, Gideon was silent, then he answered. "Marriot and Hobbes want to see Angel in Medlab at 08:30 to find out what she did and how she did it. I'll be going with Angel to make sure she doesn't say anything stu..."

*"Matthew!" said Demon warningly, to her husband. It was the same tone she used with Marcus when he was misbehaving. Angel narrowed her eyes at Gideon to show her distaste. "Comments like that are *not* going to help the situation."*

Gideon breathed in deeply, calming himself, and then continued. "To provide support and to try and

prevent Captain Marriot from having her arrested. I'm relying on the fact that Ben is an old friend, and I'll try to get him to hand over disciplinary action to me, as Angel is technically a member of my crew."

Angel decided she didn't like how pleased Gideon sounded at the idea of being responsible for her disciplinary action. "Thank you for wanting to be there to support me, Captain, but I'm going to deal with this on my own," said Angel, keeping her voice as level as possible.

"Angel, don't be stubborn. Not now." Angel turned at the sound of Lily's voice. It was the first time her little sister had spoken since arriving in Demon and Matthew's quarters.

"Lily's right," said Demon. "I think it will be better for you if Matthew goes with you. He could prevent Captain Marriot and Dr. Hobbes from doing anything, when you refuse to show them how you used a regenerator to bring Marcus back."

As Gideon's eyebrow shot up, Demon quickly advised him of Angel's proposed explanation Angel noticed Luke moving forward with interest. "So Angel intends telling them the regenerator has the ability to bring back someone from the dead?" asked Luke, curiously.

Before Angel, Demon or Lily could answer, Gideon snorted and looked at Angel. "You really think that Hobbes is going to buy that?" he asked, sarcastically.

"Actually, Matt, it could just work. There's a lot we don't know about the regenerators. For all we know, it could be possible to revive someone. It's a simple enough explanation. It might just be believed, if Angel handles it right, and Hobbes couldn't force Angel to prove it, if she says it's too dangerous," explained Luke.

Angel couldn't believe what she was hearing. Luke was supporting her, defending her against Gideon's doubts. It made not confiding in him ten times worse, and although she wanted to thank Luke, her throat tightened with guilt, so she couldn't speak, nor could she look at him. It was easier to continue swapping angry looks with Gideon.

"You really believe that, Luke?" questioned Gideon. Luke simply nodded. "Fine, then that's what we go with," Gideon didn't sound happy about it, but mercifully it looked as if he was going to accept Luke's word.

"I'll make it believable," said Angel.

"You better had, Angel," said Gideon, as he glanced at clock behind him. It was 08:05. Angel felt as if she had been there for hours, but now it was nearly time for her to make her way to Medlab, her anxiety levels shot up. It didn't help that the one person she really didn't want to be around, was going to be the one going with her.

Her attention was dragged back to Gideon as he spoke again. "Before we leave, I want that explanation. Just why did the three of you do this? What could be worth risking your own lives, and those of our children? And why didn't you tell me? Didn't you trust me?" Angel watched as Gideon turned to Demon, and for the first time, she could see something more than anger on his face. She could see that he was hurt and afraid.

Demon reached out and caressed his face, her own expression showing her sorrow. "Oh, Matthew, I'm sorry. Of course I trust you. I'd hoped that you'd never have to know we were involved." She went on to

explain, quietly, calmly, why Angel had needed to give a life in return for the one she had taken. Angel watched as Gideon listened quietly to his wife's words, growing calmer as he listened. When she finished her story, Gideon turned to Angel, his eyes no longer angry, but now showing sadness and disappointment.

"I still don't see why you needed to risk our entire family just to appease your conscience, but never mind. Let's go." Angel could have hit him for his stubbornness and the cruelty of his words, and a quick glance at her older sister showed her that Demon was equally saddened by Gideon's attitude. Before either of them could speak, Luke intervened.

"I'm going, too." Angel's knees almost gave way in relief, as Luke spoke.

"And so am I," joined in Demon, with determination.

Angel almost yelled at her sister, at exactly the same time as Gideon did. "No!" Both were startled that the other had said the same thing. Angel and Gideon stared at each other, before Angel looked away to her sister. "No, Demon, please. I don't want you going or being involved in any way, you know that."

"But I want to be there to support you! I can use my abilities to calm emotions if they get out of control. It's not as if my being there will give away my involvement in this. It will just be one sister giving the other moral support."

Angel had to admit that was true, but she didn't want either of her sisters present. "I appreciate you wanting to come, Demon, and I know Lily is thinking the same thing," she looked at Lily who nodded, "but it's better if both of you stay behind. You have the children to consider and if you're there, Marriot and Hobbes could start suspecting your involvement. Please don't argue, please?"

Lily nodded reluctantly, but Demon looked stubborn.

"Angel's right," said Gideon, as he looked at Demon. "Deborah, your empathic powers would be an advantage, but I don't want you there. I'll have enough things to worry about, without worrying about you."

Gideon looked at his wife lovingly, and finally Demon's face softened and she nodded. "Fine. I'm not happy about it, but if that's what you both want."

Gideon smiled at her, then turned to Luke, "And I don't want you there, either, Luke. I don't think you could provide any more help, and besides, this is an official meeting. Marriot probably won't allow anyone to be present who's not directly involved into Medlab."

"With all due respect, Matt, I'm Angel's boss. I think I could do a lot of good being there. I could support what Angel is saying about the regenerator, at the very least."

Angel watched as Gideon stood thinking about what Luke had said. She held her breath, hoping he would agree at least to let Luke go. With Luke there to support her explanation, things might go more smoothly. To Angel's relief, she saw Gideon nod and smile at Luke.

"You're right. You might be able to help. At least you can deal with Hobbes, while Angel and I talk to Marriot," Gideon paused for a moment then went on, "Luke, take Lily back to your rooms. I'm sure John must be worried and wanting to know what's going on. We'll be waiting for you outside in five minutes."

Luke nodded, and putting his arm around Lily's shoulder, he began to try and lead her out.

Lily stopped and pulled free to rush over to Angel, throwing her arms around her sister, saying, "Everything will be OK, I know it will!"

"Of course it will," said Angel, with false bravado as she pushed her little sister away. "Now go on, get back to John and Naima." Lily nodded, wiping the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. As she and Luke went to leave, Luke stopped to look sadly at Angel.

"You could have come to me with this, Angel. I might have been able to help. I may have been able to do something." There was no accusation in Luke's voice, only sadness and the silent question 'Why couldn't you have trusted me enough to tell me what you wanted to do?'

Angel's breath caught in her throat as she looked up at him. She barely managed to whisper, as Luke began to walk away with Lily, "I'm sorry, Luke." She didn't know whether he had even heard her, as he and Lily quietly left the room.

Angel wasn't given time to dwell on the issue, as Gideon told her brusquely that they had to get going. Before they left, Gideon turned to Demon to hug and kiss her. "Go over and stay with Lily and John. I don't want you to be alone. "

"I'd prefer to go with you and Angel," said Demon softly.

Gideon nodded, "I know you would, sweetheart, but right now it's better if you don't."

Demon sighed and nodded, as she finally gave into her husband's wishes. "All right, I'll stay."

Demon pulled out of Gideon's arms and hugged Angel. "No matter what, Angel, you did the right thing and I know it will turn out all right." Angel could feel tears threatening to fall, but she swallowed them and nodded at her sister.

"I hope so, Demon."

With that, all three left the room. When they came to Lily, John and Luke's door. Gideon signaled and a few seconds later, Luke emerged to join them outside. Demon asked Gideon to make sure her sister was OK. He said he'd do whatever he could and as soon as things were dealt with, they'd be back. Then without further delay, Angel, Luke and Gideon left Demon, who stood watching them with concern, until they disappeared around the corner of the corridor.

The entire walk to the elevator was conducted in total silence. The atmosphere between the three was thick with tension. None of them looked at each other, as they got into the elevator and rode it. Nor was anything said as they walked down the corridor to Medlab. By this time, Angel wanted to climb out of her skin, she was so nervous and afraid.

Finally, they reached Medlab and Gideon spoke. "I don't want you saying anything until you're asked a direct question. Let me do most of the talking, and whatever you do, Angel, you better make them believe your story. I swear to God, if they discover the truth about you, and if as a consequence they learn about your sisters, it won't be them who'll make you regret it, it will be me. And I will make you regret it every moment of your short life thereafter."

Angel wasn't given a chance to react as he walked forward and the doors to Medlab opened. All she could do was follow.



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