

# *The Witches of Eriadne:* *Interlude Four Q - Part 2: End of the Trial*

by *The Space Witches*



*Can Matthew and Angel help each other - and Demon?*

## *Chapter 1*

November 2272

Part 1

*"Daddy!" Gideon watched as Marcus dragged himself away from his mother and ran across the room, throwing himself into his father's arms.*

*Gideon caught his son in mid-air, then held him above his head, grinning up at the little boy. "Hey kid, have you had a good day?"*

*Marcus shook his head sadly, then reached out to hug his father's neck, whispering into his ear, "I've been good, honest I have, but Mummy still doesn't want me." The little boy tucked his head into the side of Gideon's neck, and a moment later, the Captain could feel the dampness of his son's tears. He looked over Marcus' head at Deborah, who remained seated on the floor, watching them both, her face completely expressionless.*

*Gideon kissed the top of his son's head gently, and carried him through to boy's bedroom. As he did so, he wondered exactly whose bedroom it was now. While Marcus had slept in what had once been the Captain's sleeping quarters for the previous two years, Gideon had spent every night there for the last two months. Marcus now slept with his mother, in the large bed in her quarters that she had once shared with her husband. To Gideon, the sleeping arrangements summed up everything that was wrong with his marriage. The physical distance between him and his wife was a tangible manifestation of the emotional*

*distance Deborah had created between herself and everyone who loved her.*

*The Captain sat down on the narrow bunk and dried his son's tears. This wasn't the first time he'd had to do this, and he feared it wouldn't be the last. At three and a half, Marcus was too young to understand that he wasn't to blame for his mother's depression. All the child could understand was that his previously loving mother no longer seemed to care for him.*

*Gideon held the little boy tightly and assured him again that he hadn't done anything wrong, that Marcus was a good boy and that his mother was just feeling a little unwell. He'd given up trying to tell Marcus that it would just take a little time and then everything would be all right again. To a three year old, a day was a long time. The coldness and emotional distance Deborah now displayed had been going on for two months. To a small child, that was an eternity, and Gideon could see no sign of his wife recovering from the shock and trauma she'd suffered on Centauri Prime.*

*The discovery that a Vorlon, or at least some part of one, inhabited Deborah had come as a shock to them all. Deborah had been terrified by the violent action taken by the Vorlon when it had emerged from within her and attacked her sister and the Centauri Emperor. She had reacted by locking herself under control, emotionally and physically, not allowing herself to respond to anything, in an attempt to keep the thing inside her from ever breaking free again.*

*Gideon now realized that his empathic wife had felt the fear of everyone around her, had sensed that everyone she loved and trusted was frightened of her, when they first discovered what she carried inside her. Deborah had responded to those feelings by retreating from her friends and family, isolating herself, so she wouldn't have to feel what they felt. The Captain had tried to explain to his wife that what she detected was not fear of her, but fear for her. He had tried to explain that his worst dread was of losing the wife he loved. Deborah had listened quietly, said she understood, then carried on as if he had never spoken.*

*For the last two months, Gideon felt as if he'd been living with a robot. Deborah carried out her role of wife and mother efficiently, but there was no emotion, no joy, no love in anything she did. Marcus had inherited enough of his mother's empathic abilities to recognize the emotional emptiness of his mother's behavior. Being a typical three year old, who believed the universe revolved around him, Marcus thought it was all his fault, that somehow he'd been wicked and his mother didn't love him any more.*

*Gideon spent the next hour playing with his son, gradually getting the boy to smile and chatter about what he'd done during the day. He discovered that Deborah had taken Marcus to the Medbay crèche soon after Gideon had gone on duty that morning, and had only collected the child a brief time before the Captain's return to their quarters. Gideon had hoped that if Deborah spent time with her son, she would eventually recognize how badly her behavior was hurting him. If she kept abandoning Marcus to the care of others at every opportunity, there was little hope of that happening. Gideon made an effort to suppress his anger at Deborah's neglect of their son. Marcus was sensitive enough to pick up on his feelings, and would probably think that his father's annoyance was his fault too.*

*A quiet, cool voice interrupted them. "I've made some dinner, if you're hungry." Gideon looked up to see Deborah standing in the doorway. Her face was still expressionless, a frozen mask showing no feelings.*

*Gideon smiled at his son, asking, "Are you hungry?" Marcus nodded, so Gideon looked up at his wife and smiled. "That makes two of us. Let's eat." He carried Marcus through to the living room, stopping when he saw that the dining table was only set for two. Gideon turned to Deborah and asked, "What about you? Why aren't you eating with us?"*

Deborah returned from the kitchen area, carrying two plates of food, saying quietly, "I'm not really hungry. If I want something later, I'll get it." Gideon watched as she set the plates down on the table, then turned to leave the room. His mind was racing with conflicting emotions, all of which he did his best to suppress, aware that his son was watching his parents closely. Gideon pushed down his anger that, yet again, Deborah was running away from him and Marcus, a pattern of behavior that was becoming all too familiar. He also suppressed the concern he felt that Deborah had lost weight steadily since they'd left Centauri Prime. Her cheekbones stood out more prominently in her face, and her hands looked almost fragile. Her looks as well as her actions worried Gideon. He watched as Deborah retreated to her bedroom, the place where she seemed to spend most of her time these days.

Gideon ate dinner with his son, then took him off to play for another hour or so, before giving him his bath and putting him to bed. This had also become a regular pattern. The Captain would put his son to bed in his bunk, then later would move the child to his mother's room. When Gideon finally returned to the quarters he shared with his wife, the dining table had been cleared and the kitchen tidied, but the living room was empty. Deborah was still hiding.

Carefully closing the door that separated Marcus' room from his parents' quarters, Gideon relaxed his control over his feelings for the first time that evening. Now Marcus was asleep, the Captain could allow himself to feel the anger, worry and fear he'd been suppressing since his shift had ended. He glared at the closed door to his wife's bedroom and decided that enough was enough. He'd been patient and understanding for weeks and it wasn't helping. Deborah was retreating further from him and the rest of her family with every day that passed. Her health was deteriorating and their son was suffering. It had to stop.

Gideon almost wrenched the door to his wife's bedroom off its hinges as he flung it open, and marched through the doorway. Deborah was lying on the bed with her back to the door and as he looked at her, Gideon felt all the anger drain out of him. His wife's back pressed against the material of her t-shirt, showing each vertebrae of her spine standing out clearly, as she lay curled into a fetal position. As Deborah heard him enter the room, she rolled over to face him. Gideon could see that his wife's eyes were red from weeping, and her face was stained with tears.

Deborah raised her hand to wipe her cheeks, and the thinness of her fingers and the frozen look on her pale face made Gideon's heart contract. He moved to sit next to her on the bed and sighed with sadness when she shifted away from him, pressing her back against the wall behind her, staring at him as if he'd come to attack her. He reached his hand out slowly, wanting to touch her, to reassure her that he'd never hurt her, but she flinched away from his touch.

Gideon spoke softly. "We can't carry on like this, Deborah. Something has to change. This is hurting you, me and most of all, Marcus."

Deborah nodded and whispered back, "I know. I think you should send me away."

Gideon exploded, jumping to his feet and pacing the room. "NO! That's not going to solve anything! How will that help Marcus? Is that going to make him feel better? Is it going to reassure him that his mother still loves him? And where the hell do you think you're going to go? You can't leave this ship without taking your sisters with you. Do you plan on making them, and Luke and John, as miserable as you've made Marcus and me? Just how many people do you want to hurt, Deborah? How many more people are going to suffer because of that thing inside you?"

*He knew he was being unfair, he knew he was lashing out at the wrong target, but all his anger, fear and grief exploded out of him. Everything he'd been bottling up for weeks came pouring out. Deborah sat silently, taking it all in, saying nothing. When Gideon's anger finally ran out, he glared at her as she sat, still frozen faced, on the bed they had once shared. "Well? Don't you have anything to say?" Her silence was making him even angrier.*

*Deborah's words were almost inaudible. "I don't know what to say or do. What do you want, Matthew? Tell me what you want from me."*

*Gideon almost screamed as he grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. "I want my wife back! I want to be with the woman I love--to talk to her, to hear her laugh. I want to go to sleep at night holding her, and wake up in the morning to see her face on the pillow next to me. I want you, Deborah, that's what I want!" He let go of her abruptly, and she fell back on the bed, staring up at him, still expressionless.*

*After a few moments, Deborah pulled herself upright, retreating across the bed again, pulling her knees up in front of her and hugging her legs tightly. Gideon could see the red marks he'd left on her upper arms as he'd shaken her and he felt deeply ashamed. He started to say, "I'm sorry..." when Deborah interrupted him.*

*Her words were still a whisper, delivered in a cold, emotionless tone that felt like an icicle stabbing into Gideon's heart. "That woman doesn't exist any more, Matthew. She got left behind on Centauri Prime. I can't be her. This is all there is now. I know that you don't--you can't--love the person I am now. No one could. That's why you should let me go. Find someone else to make you and Marcus happy. I'll go...somewhere, I don't know where... somewhere else on the ship, so you won't have to see me again."*

*Gideon lost hold of his final shreds of temper and yelled, "If that's what you want, fine! Don't bother going anywhere. I'll go and I'll take Marcus with me. You can stay here and fester in your own misery!"*

*He flung out of the bedroom and through into his old quarters, throwing himself into the chair behind the desk there and dropping his head into his hands. Gideon refused to allow himself to cry, trying to hang onto his anger, because that at least was better than the grief he felt at losing his wife.*

*After a few moments, he stood again and walked through to his son's room. Marcus was deeply asleep, hugging Half-Ted tightly to his chest, sucking on the bear's sole remaining ear. Gideon wondered how he was going to explain to his son that Deborah wouldn't be living with them any more. The logistics of taking care of Marcus without her weren't that much of a problem. Between the Medbay crèche, Angel and Lily, the practical side of looking after his son would be easy enough. The emotional issues that would arise if Gideon and Deborah parted were much more of a concern. For a moment, he wondered if it would be better for Marcus if they did separate. Would their son be better off if he were taken away from the emotional wasteland of his mother's behavior? The Captain cursed himself for even thinking such a thought.*

*Reaching out to stroke his son's blond curls, Gideon calmed down enough to realize that he'd over-reacted. It was too soon to give up on all he and Deborah had together. She needed his help and support, not his anger and harsh words. The problem was that Gideon had no idea how to help and support his wife through her trauma.*

*It suddenly occurred to him that Deborah wasn't the only person who'd been hurt on Centauri Prime. Gideon had almost forgotten that his wife wasn't alone in suffering from the aftermath of the Vorlon's attack. Someone else on the Excalibur had been badly hurt at that time, and was receiving help in getting*

*through the consequent pain and suffering. Someone who was close to Deborah.*

*Pausing only to instruct the computer to call him if Marcus stirred, Gideon left his quarters, intent on finding his wife the help she needed.*

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*Angel walked over to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea. She had just completed another session with Catherine Manning, a Psychologist. Catherine had been helping Angel work her way through the emotional scars and trauma that had been affecting her since the appalling episode on Centauri Prime.*

*It had been Luke's suggestion that she talk to someone, professionally. He had seen that Angel was in emotional trouble after what had happened to her on Centauri Prime, and what had nearly happened to all of them. Angel had blamed herself for those events.*

*At first Angel had said no, she didn't want to talk to a stranger, she wanted to talk to Luke. He was her friend and confidante, someone who she had talked to many times before when she had been in trouble.*

*Luke had responded gently, saying that he was a friend and any other time he would be there to talk to, but this time he just wasn't qualified to give her the help she needed. He told her that he did have a very good friend who was a Psychologist, who he believed could give Angel counseling and help. Angel had worked through the nightmare events on Centauri Prime with Catherine, and she was doing a lot better for it.*

*Moving from where she had been standing in the kitchen, Angel went into the living room and sat. Her thoughts went to her sisters and how they had been affected by the events on Centauri Prime. Lily, who had at first feared that she too might have a Vorlon inside her, was now convinced that she didn't. She was getting through the trauma with love and support from John and Luke. Demon wasn't dealing with things at all, as far as Angel could tell, except by way of withdrawing from everyone, including Gideon.*

*Angel and Lily had tried to reach out to Demon, but their sister constantly pushed them away. Angel felt a surge of guilt well up inside her. She blamed herself for what was happening to Demon. If it hadn't been for Angel's mistakes, the Vorlon inside Demon might never have revealed itself. Angel and Lily had admitted to each other that they feared the Vorlon, and Angel knew that Demon had picked up on their fear, which had contributed to her withdrawal. Demon refused to listen when Angel and Lily tried to assure her that it was the Vorlon they feared, not her, and that nothing had changed in the way they loved her.*

*The young witch wished she could reach Demon somehow. She was afraid of what was happening to her sister. Demon had always been the strong one, but now she was breaking apart, and Angel felt helpless to stop it. Angel had tried suggesting to Demon that she talk with Catherine, but Demon had refused, saying she was fine. It was clear as crystal that she was far from fine.*

*Angel suddenly felt angry. Didn't Demon care that everyone was worried about her? Didn't she care about her son? Didn't she care that Gideon was going through hell because he was constantly worrying about her? Angel knew that since they had left Centauri Prime, Gideon and Demon had been having marital problems. She closed her eyes, feeling guilty for being angry. She didn't know for sure how she would react if she had a Vorlon inside her. Maybe, she would have done exactly what her sister had done, and withdrawn from everyone she cared about.*

*Chewing her lip, Angel racked her brain to find some way to convince her sister to make an appointment*

*with Catherine. She knew that she was beating her head against a brick wall, but she was going to keep trying. She loved her sister and was damned if she would let Demon drift away so far that they lost her. Angel was thinking through strategies for getting Demon to get help, when the sound of the door buzzer roused her from her thoughts. Wondering who it could be, Angel called for the door to open. Her eyes widened in mild surprise when she saw Gideon standing outside. Recovering quickly, Angel waved him in.*

*"I was just passing and thought I would come see how you were doing," he said, as he entered Angel's quarters.*

*Angel's heart lurched at the sight of him. He obviously wasn't sleeping well and it looked as if he was losing weight. But the sadness in Gideon's eyes that really affected Angel. She knew the cause--his concern for Demon.*

*"It's a welcome surprise," she said with a smile. She indicated for Gideon to take a seat, then asked him if she could get him some coffee.*

*"I'd love some, thanks."*

*Angel went into the kitchen, and a few minutes later returned with a cup of coffee and handed it to him. Gideon took it with a smile of thanks. Angel went over to the chair opposite him and sat down, curling her legs underneath her, as she watched him inhale the aroma from the coffee, before taking a sip. She knew he hadn't just been passing by her quarters and that he'd come to see her for more than just a social call.*

*"You didn't just pass by, Matt. There's something on your mind, isn't there?" she asked, gently.*

*Angel watched as Gideon leaned forward and put his cup on the table in front of him. He sat back and nodded. Angel wasn't at all surprised when Gideon said in a sad, tired voice.*

*"Yes, I do. It's about Deborah."*

*Gideon sighed. "I'm worried about her, Angel. She's going further away from us every day, she's losing weight, and I just made it all ten times worse by yelling at her. I don't know what to do for the best." He dropped his head in his hands, rubbing his forehead where it had begun to ache. [A tension headache; just what I need!]*

*He felt the couch move slightly, as Angel came to sit beside him. Gideon looked up to see her smiling gently at him as she asked, "Headache? Here, let me..."*

*Gideon turned his head toward her as she reached out and touched her fingertips to his temples, massaging gently. It helped. Not as much as when Deborah did it, using her ability to project emotions to send waves of calm and serenity, easing his tensions and stresses at the end of a long day, but it still helped. Gideon closed his eyes and breathed deeply, becoming aware of the perfume Angel wore, feeling the gentle strength of her fingers on his face as she slowly dispelled his pain.*

*After a few moments, he opened his eyes and lifted his hands to cover hers, gently pulling them away from his forehead. Pausing only to place a brief kiss on Angel's fingers, he smiled and said, "Thanks. You really do have healing hands."*

*Gideon kept holding Angel's hands as he looked at her sadly, asking, "How are you *really* doing, Angel? You went through a rough time on Centauri Prime. I know that you've been talking to someone Luke recommended. Has it helped?"*

*Angel nodded and squeezed Gideon's hands. "Yes, it's helped a lot. Catherine has helped me see that I may have been stupid to trust Ursa in the way that I did, but not everything that happened was my fault. The Centauri were determined to take one of us to control. It was my bad luck, as well as my stupidity, which made me their victim. One thing is certain though," Gideon saw the pain in Angel's eyes as she confided, "It'll be a long time before I trust another man."*

*Angel's weak attempt at a smile sent a pain through Gideon's chest. He knew that she was trying to be brave and strong, but that her struggle was made all the harder by the lack of her sister's support. Deborah had always been there for her younger sister in times of crisis, had always provided the shoulder for Angel to cry on, and the arm for her to lean on. Deborah's coldness and distance must have been hard for Angel to bear, at a time when she needed her sister's strength and love.*

*Gideon knew that Angel had been trying hard to help her older sister, had tried to put aside her own suffering to help Deborah through her depression. Deborah had pushed her younger sister away, in the same way as she had pushed away everyone who loved her and wanted to help her.*

*Gideon squeezed Angel's hands again, saying, "I wish I could have done more to help you through this. I wish Deborah could have been there for you. You shouldn't have had to go through this without our support."*

*Angel hurried to reassure him. "Oh, Matt, I understand. You and Demon have your own problems. Lily and Luke and everyone have been so kind, helping me through this, finding Catherine for me. I just wish I could persuade Demon to talk to Catherine, too. I know how much Demon is hurting, but she won't listen, she won't accept that she needs help or that anyone *can* help her. She just says that she has to learn to live with it, that no amount of talking will change the fact that she has a monster inside her."*

*Gideon could see Angel becoming more distressed with every word she spoke, obviously deeply concerned about her sister, and his anger started to build again. He wasn't quite sure where his anger should be directed, but he couldn't deny the feeling. He found himself gripping Angel's hands more tightly as he burst out, "I'm sick of this, Angel, sick to death of the whole thing. I'm sick of being angry and afraid. I'm angry with Deborah for giving into it, for isolating herself from everyone who loves her. I'm angry with the Centauri who hurt you and provoked the Vorlon into emerging. I'm angry with the Vorlon for doing this to Deborah, and I'm angry with myself because I can't seem to help her."*

*Gideon bowed his head and rested it on his hands where they still clasped Angel's fingers. "And I'm so afraid, Angel. I'm losing her. Every day she goes a little further away from me, and I can't get her back. I love Deborah so much, but this is destroying us. How long can I go on loving someone who pushes me away? She won't let me near, and she won't let me help. She won't even let me hold her or touch her. And she looks sick. She hasn't eaten properly since it happened. I'm scared out of my mind that she'll get really sick and die, or that she'll find some other way to..." He could hardly bear to think of it, never mind say the words, but he forced them out. "To end it."*

*Angel gasped in horror. "No! Matt, no, she would never do that. Demon knows that it would hurt Lily and me terribly if she tried to...to...what you said. And she loves you and Marcus too much. She would never hurt you like that!"*

*The anguish and fear that had been building inside Gideon for days, for weeks, burst out of him as he said, "But she might think we're better off without her! She said that to me tonight. She told me that I should find someone else to make Marcus and me happy. How can she think that? Doesn't she know that I can't even bear the thought of living without her? Angel, this is killing me!"*

*Gideon let go of Angel's hands abruptly and leaped to his feet, pacing the floor as he ranted, "Damn those Vorlons! Damn them to hell for what they did to you all! They were supposed to be the good guys, the ones who were on our side, but they were as bad as the Shadows. They didn't give a damn who they hurt and what mess they left behind. They just wanted to win their war, regardless of the consequences. Damn those bastards!"*

*Angel stood and placed her hand on his chest to stop his pacing, and he could see the fear in her face. "Matt, please, calm down! This isn't helping anyone. The Vorlons weren't all bad. When we were on B5, Marcus Cole told me about a Vorlon named Kosh. He stood up for the younger races and tried to help. You can't blame a whole race for the actions of one of them."*

*Gideon yelled into Angel's face, "Can't I? Just watch me! I blame those bastards for everything bad that has happened to us these last few months. I blame them for hurting you, for hurting Deborah, for taking her away from me, from Marcus and from all her family. I blame them for the fact that my son cries for his mother every night, wondering why she doesn't love him any more. I blame them for the pain I carry around every day, the gaping hole in my heart where I once felt Deborah's love. It hurts, Angel. It hurts like hell. I can't feel her love any more and it feels like my heart has been ripped out of my chest."*

*Angel's face broke up and she started to weep, tears streaming down her face, as she sobbed, "You shouldn't blame them, Matt. You should blame me. It's all my fault!"*

*Angel sobbed as her guilt overwhelmed her, and she felt herself being pulled into Matt's chest, his hand stroking her hair as he tried to comfort her. She lifted her face to look into his eyes, all too aware that she had been the cause of the pain she could see there. She had to speak, to explain, to let him know where the true responsibility for everything lay.*

*"I'm to blame for this mess, Matt, not the Vorlon. If I hadn't been so stupid as to trust Ursa, none of this would have happened." Angel forced the words out through a throat tightened by pain and guilt. The sorrow in Matt's eyes as he looked down at her, nearly broke her heart. She dropped her head to his shoulder and sobbed bitter tears of self-recrimination.*

*Matt held her close, kissing the top of her head, and stroking her back, comforting her, almost as Angel had seen him comfort Marcus when the little boy was hurt. The strength of Matt's arms, and the warmth of his chest as he held her tightly, gradually eased Angel's pain. She listened as he whispered reassurances.*

*"Angel, what's happened to Deborah isn't your fault. Yes, trusting Ursa wasn't the smartest thing you've ever done, but that isn't what caused all this. What was done to you may have been the trigger, but that damned Vorlon must have been there since you were left in stasis on Eriadne. It was inevitable that one day something would happen that would make it emerge. It's been like a time bomb, sitting in Deborah's head. None of us knew it was there, but it was just waiting for the right sequence of events to explode. I can't, I won't blame you for what those bastards did to her."*

*Angel swallowed hard and managed to stop sobbing, looking up into Matt's anguished eyes as he went*



*on, "I wish I'd known that one day I'd lose her. Maybe I could have stopped myself from loving her. Or I could have treasured every moment I had with her more, knowing that our time together would be so short. Oh God, Angel, how am I going to tell Marcus that his mother is leaving us? How am I going to live without her? How do I go on, when I'm not sure I want to, if she's not with me?"*

*Matt's agony was clearly visible on his face, and Angel's heart went out to him. He loved Demon so much that the prospect of losing her was unbearable for him. Angel knew that she had to put her own grief and guilt aside, that she had to find some way to help Matt through his pain. She couldn't go back and change the past, couldn't prevent Demon knowing about the Vorlon she carried inside her, couldn't prevent her sister withdrawing from her friends and family. But what Angel could do was help and support the man who still held her in his arms. She could listen to him, be there for him, and help him as Catherine had helped her.*

*Angel lifted her hand to Matt's cheek, wiping away the single tear that rested there, the visible sign of his loss of control over his pain. He turned his head away, and she guessed that he was embarrassed at this sign of weakness, of allowing himself to cry. Angel smiled sadly and stood on tiptoe to kiss Matt's cheek, to let him know that it was all right, that he could relax with her, that he didn't have to be strong for her.*

*As Angel went to kiss his cheek, Matt turned his head back to look at her, and instead of pressing her lips to his face, she found that her mouth had met his. They both froze for a moment, equally surprised by what had happened. Then Angel heard Matt groan softly, and his mouth opened under hers.*

*Their kiss seemed endless, until finally Matt broke away and both of them gasped for much needed air. Angel knew that he needed this. He was drowning in pain over Demon, and Angel couldn't think of any other way to save him. She would be there for him physically, showing him that she loved him, and using her love to comfort him. Luke had done this for her years before, and it had saved her. Now it was Angel's turn to do the same for Matt. Maybe if she could give him the love and emotional contact he was missing from Demon, Angel could help keep him strong enough to continue his battle for Demon's life and love.*

*Suddenly, Matt claimed her mouth again, in a heated, breathtaking kiss. There was no longer room for thought of any kind as Angel felt herself being swept up into his arms and carried through to her bedroom.*

*For so long, Gideon had denied his feelings for Angel. Together they had agreed that they could never give into their desire for each other, because of Deborah. But for now, Gideon couldn't...wouldn't fight it. He needed this. He needed to have someone in his arms who didn't push him away, who welcomed his touch. He was tired of feeling alone and rejected. Angel was giving him something he needed. Not just sex, but warmth and comfort. Later, he might regret it, but for now he needed and wanted Angel and what she could give him. He carried her into the bedroom and started to undress her.*

*Gideon helped Angel out of her clothes, gently caressing her skin when she stood before him, naked. His hungry eyes raked over her body, lingering on her breasts with their erect nipples, then trailing down to fix on the soft mound of dark curls. He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. Gideon only broke the kiss to lay her down on the bed, his hazel eyes dark with passion as he gazed down at her.*

*Angel was unable to take her eyes off Gideon as he slowly removed his clothes, until he was completely*

*naked before her. Just as he had done, she let her eyes take in the sight of his body. It had been a long time since Angel had seen Gideon naked, and she feasted her eyes on him, taking in every inch of him, from the soft dusting of hair on his chest, down to where his cock was already starting to grow hard. Then he walked over to the bed and lowered himself beside her, kissing her again. Angel heard herself moan as Gideon pressed her back into the bed, one hand starting to explore her body as he deepened the kiss. Her body arched against the touch of his hand as it gently kneaded her breast, his thumb and forefinger rubbing her sensitive nipple before his hand moved to give her other breast the same attention.*

*Her body was leaping into flames at Gideon's touch, and she could feel her center grow hot and wet, with desire and need. She entwined her hands into his hair and pulled his head forward, deepening the kiss. She suddenly gasped, breaking the kiss, as his hand, which had trailed soft caresses down her ribcage and stomach, finally came to rest on the V of dark curls, unmoving for the time being.*

*Angel's heart leaped into her throat, as Gideon whispered a soft command against her ear. "Spread your legs, Angel." Angel did as he asked, allowing his hand to move down between them. For the moment, Gideon did not touch her hot center. Instead, he began to trail kisses along her neck and shoulder, as his hand trailed soft caressing circles on the inside of her thighs, slowly and purposefully working up from her knees.*

*Angel heard herself cry out involuntarily, as Gideon slid a finger past her damp folds into her. He lifted his head and moved to kiss her, his tongue pushing past her parted lips into the haven of her mouth, entwining with her tongue. His lips cut off another soft cry of pleasure, as he inserted another finger inside her and slowly, gently, began to finger fuck her. Angel arched her hips, welcoming his fingers, wanting to take them deeper inside her. Her fingers dug into Gideon's shoulder, anchoring herself to him.*

*After several strokes of his fingers inside her, Gideon let his thumb rub her clit, the already swollen nub swelling more and growing harder. Angel could feel her body moving closer and closer to climax. He must have sensed he was pushing her closer to the edge, as he withdrew his fingers, leaving Angel disappointed and wanting. She opened her eyes to find Gideon's hazel eyes looking at her with desire.*

*He placed a brief kiss on her lips before whispering, "Not yet, Angel." Without another word, Gideon set to kissing her again: her mouth, her neck, her shoulder, her ears and her breasts. Shifting position again, Gideon let his fingers move along the inside of Angel's thigh, while he kissed his way down along the soft swell of her hip, down past her curls, to the top of her thigh. Angel's breath caught in her throat, as once again he pushed two fingers inside her, moving to lie between her legs. Her breathing became more ragged as she felt his hot breath on the inside of her thigh. Then his tongue flicked out and touched her clit, and Angel felt as if she would explode. When Gideon took the swollen nub between his teeth and gently bit down, Angel heard herself cry out again. Her hands fell beside her to grasp the bed sheets tightly, her eyes closed as she gasped for breath.*

*Again, Gideon must have sensed how close to the edge he had taken her, because he lifted his head and withdrew his fingers, wet with her juices. Angel opened her eyes to find him looking at her from between her spread legs, his eyes mirroring the same dark hunger and passion she was feeling. He placed one last kiss on her clit before moving to lie beside her. As he moved, she could see his cock was hard and swollen, and when his movement caused his rigid shaft to brush against her thigh, she heard him make a small sound in his throat.*

*Angel decided that it was time to give the Captain a little of his own treatment. Lifting herself above him, she pushed him gently onto his back, then lowered her head and kissed him, as her hand moved up and down his cock with feather-light touches. She wanted to stimulate him further, but just as he had done*

*with her, she wanted to take it slowly.*

*She moved her hand away from Gideon's cock and stroked the hard, flat plain of his belly, moving her hand up until it reached the soft dusting of hair on his chest. She ran her fingers through it, savoring the silky softness between her fingers. Angel kissed her way from his mouth, down his neck, along his Adam's apple, flicking her tongue to lick little circles around the hollow at the base of his throat. From there, she worked her way down to Gideon's chest, where she took one of his nipples into her mouth and suckled it. When Angel heard Gideon moan softly, she smiled against his chest, then playfully bit down, while her fingers tweaked his other nipple, causing him to buck slightly beneath her. She hadn't inflicted any pain, but enough pressure to make him gasp.*

*Pleased with the effect she was having on his body, Angel left Gideon's nipples and began to kiss her way down his body, working her way to the thing that interested her most. When she reached it, Angel placed a kiss on the tip of his cock, then shifted position until she was sitting astride Gideon's knees. Glancing up, she saw Gideon watching her with intense, hazel eyes, darkened with desire. For a moment, she was captivated, her heart beating faster at the look of absolute want and need that she saw in his eyes. The feeling that washed over her was so intense that for a moment she stopped breathing.*

*Then Angel lowered her head, and let her tongue flick out to lick a small drop of pre-come from the head of Gideon's cock. She savored the taste of him, so familiar and for so long missed, then opened her mouth and slowly took the tip between her lips. Slowly and deliberately, Angel moved her mouth down, as she took more and more of him inside, until his hard shaft was deep in her mouth. Moving a hand between his legs she began to fondle his balls, gently kneading them as she sucked his cock, moving her mouth up and down his hard length.*

*She felt his hand entwining in her hair, pushing her mouth down, as he wanted her to take him deeper in her mouth. Angel did as he wanted, until she brought him dangerously close to climax, just as he had done with her. But she didn't want him coming, not like this. Angel released Gideon's cock and slid up to lie beside him again. She could feel her juices running between her legs, but for the moment ignored it, because soon enough she would feel him inside her, where she wanted and needed him most.*

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*Gideon reached out and cupped Angel's face, drawing her closer so he could kiss her. He could taste himself on her lips, mixed with her unique honey flavor. For the moment, he ignored the ache and heat in his balls and cock. He didn't want to rush things with Angel, he wanted to make love to her, not just to fuck her. He needed the warmth and love she was giving him, not just the sex.*

*They lay in each other's arms, their hands and mouths stimulating each other, always pushing closer and closer to the edge, then backing off, allowing themselves to cool down before they stroked, caressed and kissed again. When neither of them could stand anymore, Gideon rolled Angel onto her back and lowered himself onto her, as she spread her legs wide. He didn't enter her at once, as he found himself suddenly rendered motionless by the look in Angel's eyes.*

*She had been through so much recently, and Gideon recalled her words, spoken less than an hour before. "It'll be a long time before I trust another man." Yet Angel was now looking at him, not hiding any emotion or feeling from him. In the depths of her blue eyes, Gideon could see trust and above all else, love.*

*He moved forward and gently thrust into Angel, his hard cock pushing past the tight walls, until he was buried deep inside her core. As Gideon lay on top of her, unmoving, he could feel Angel trembling beneath him, as her arms moved around his shoulders, clinging to him. Gideon lifted his head and dared to look*

*into her eyes again, seeing love and desire reflecting back. He felt her hand stroke his cheek, as Angel spoke, her voice a low husky whisper. "Please, don't stop, Matt. Make love to me."*

*And he did. Slowly, he began to move, pulling out of her almost completely, before thrusting gently back inside her. He felt her move beneath him, raising her hips to match his movements, taking him as deep as she could with each thrust. Gideon kept his pace slow, drawing it out as long as he could. He kissed Angel long and hard as he moved with her. He heard her moan against his mouth, and she arched her back as he fondled her breast. He could feel the walls of her vagina pulsing against his throbbing cock, as with every stroke inside her, he pushed them closer and closer to climax.*

*Still Gideon thrust in and out of her slowly, even when he could feel his balls growing heavy, he forced himself to hold back, making this moment last. He lowered his head and as he continued to move, he nuzzled Angel's neck, gently sucking on the soft flesh, until he knew he had marked her. He felt her arms tighten around his shoulders, her nails digging almost painfully into his flesh. He heard her whisper gruffly against his neck, "I can't take it anymore. Please, Matt...let me come!"*

*At her words, Gideon realized he too couldn't hold out any longer. With a few more deep thrusts, he pushed Angel over the edge. He could feel her walls tighten and clamp around his cock as she came hard. Gideon felt her entire body spasm with the force of the orgasm that tore through her. He thrust again, causing Angel to arch off the bed as another orgasm, more powerful than the last, swept over her body. This time, as her walls pulsed and tightened around him, Gideon came too. He exploded in an intense, almost painful, orgasm, releasing a hot stream deep inside her. He felt himself thrust forward again, involuntarily, causing Angel to scream out his name, as yet another orgasm gripped her, causing her walls to tighten again. Gideon heard himself half moan, half cry out, as her walls clamped around him one last time and carried him with her in the same final overwhelming orgasm.*

*After the wave of intense pleasure subsided, Gideon half collapsed on top of Angel, pinning her beneath him, careful not to crush her. His whole body was shuddering, slick with excretions from their loving making. His arms and legs felt weak, as if he had run a marathon, and for a moment he was unable to move from where he lay, still deep inside her. Both he and Angel were breathing raggedly, and Gideon could feel Angel's body still trembling. Gently, as he lay on top of her, he kissed her. The kiss was tender and soft, lasting only a few moments, before they finally broke apart. When he looked at Angel, he found her smiling up at him, and could feel her fingers gently stroking his jaw.*

*"That was wonderful," Angel said, her voice husky and her face glowing. Gideon watched her, looking so beautiful, her hair disarrayed on the pillow, her skin flushed and moist from lovemaking. For a moment, she reminded him of how Deborah looked after he had made love to her. The reminder was too painful, and he ruthlessly pushed it aside.*

*"Matt?" Gideon saw concern on Angel's face and realized that he hadn't hidden his pain quickly enough. "Is everything all right?"*

*He kissed her gently, and gave her the warmest smile he could manage at that moment, "Everything's wonderful."*

*He knew he could have told her the real reason his pain, but he also knew that it would have hurt her if he had spoken of Deborah at that moment. Shifting his body, Gideon laid down beside her.*

*For a long while, they were both silent, each lost in private contemplation. Gideon knew he would have to speak about what had happened between them and how they would go forward. He knew why he had*

*needed Angel, and at one level, he understood her need for him. At the same time, Gideon couldn't help wondering why she had wanted to make love to him. Angel surely knew that he would never give up fighting for Deborah, and that he could never leave her. Gideon closed his eyes, wondering why Angel would do this, when he suspected that it would hurt her when he went back to Deborah. For a moment, he considered waiting before dealing with the issue, but then decided that delay might make things worse. Gideon sighed at the uneasiness he felt welling up in his stomach at having to discuss this.*

*"Angel?" Gideon opened his eyes when there was no response. He looked down and saw that Angel's eyes were closed. Her breathing was shallow and regular, and he realized that she had fallen asleep. He smiled tenderly. [It can wait until later.]*

*Gideon lay back against the pillow as he held Angel in his arms, enjoying watching her sleep, until his own eyes grew heavy. He tried to fight it, thinking about Marcus, alone in his quarters. He knew that he really should get back to his son. [I'll lie here for a minute, then wake Angel and tell her we have to talk. Then I have to get home.] Gideon's eyes closed and within minutes he was soundly asleep.*

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*The gentle chime of the computer roused Angel from her sleep. For a moment, she was confused. She could feel a warm arm holding her tightly, but when she opened her eyes, she could see that she was in her room on the Excalibur. When Angel looked up at the man holding her, she felt a moment of panic as she thought, [Lucas!] Then it all came back to her. This was Matthew, the man she had comforted, the man who was in such pain, the man she lov...*

*Angel stopped that thought before she could finish it. She would not let herself go there. The computer chimed again, and she answered softly, telling it to lower the volume of its message.*

*"The Captain requested notification when his son awoke. Marcus Gideon is waking now."*

*Thanking the computer, Angel turned to look at the man lying beside her, still soundly sleeping. The lines on his face had faded, although the shadows under his eyes still showed how tired he was and how much he needed this sleep. For a moment, Angel considered leaving him, letting him sleep. She tried to tell herself that she would be doing that for him, because he needed to sleep, not because she wanted him in her bed, in her arms, in her body. Deep down, Angel was too honest to allow herself that excuse. She knew what she had to do. Gently shaking his shoulder, she whispered, "You have to go, Matt. Marcus is waking up."*

*The Captain's eyes flicked open, and Angel wished she could spend the rest of the night lying next to him, gazing into their hazel brown depths. Matt's eyes were warm and kind, unlike another pair of golden brown eyes into which she had looked so often. Lucas' eyes had rarely been warmed by affection, in the way Matt's were.*

*Matt smiled at her and pulled her head down to kiss her gently on the lips. It was a warm kiss, mouth closed, but full of tenderness. "Thanks. I don't want him to be alone when he wakes up. I shouldn't have let myself go to sleep." He threw back the covers and climbed out of bed. Angel watched, as he quickly pulled on his clothes. When he was dressed, he returned to the bed and sat on the edge, then took her hand and lifted it to his mouth, kissing it gently.*

*"Thank you for everything, Angel. I shouldn't have let myself have this time with you. It's not fair on you. Tonight you gave me something very precious, something I needed desperately, but I shouldn't have taken it, as I know that the giving may hurt you."*

*Angel pressed the fingers of her other hand to his lips before he could go on. "I know that you love Demon and you always will. I know that, Matt. I know that you and Demon belong together. What we did tonight was wonderful. We gave each other the comfort we both needed. But now you must go back to your wife and son, and we'll go on as we were before. Friends. Very, very good friends."*

*Matt pulled her into his arms and hugged her tightly, whispering, "Thank you," into her hair, before lifting her chin for one final, gentle kiss. "Goodnight, and sleep well, Angel."*

*Then he was gone.*

*Angel dropped her head to her pillow and cried for what she could never have.*

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*Gideon walked briskly back to his quarters, his mind in turmoil. In one way, he felt better than he had done in weeks. The time he had spent with Angel had eased some of the pain, driven away the depression that had hung over him. It wasn't just the sex--although that had been wonderful--but just for a while, he had felt loved and wanted, something that had been sorely missing from his life during the past couple of months.*

*He had acknowledged his feelings for Angel a year before, after she was hurt defending his ship above Stryvstextix, but tonight he had allowed himself to act on those feelings, something he'd sworn to himself that he'd never do. If Deborah ever found out... Gideon refused to allow himself to even think of the pain that such a betrayal would cause his wife. He promised himself that he would never allow it to happen again, and would never allow Deborah to discover what he and Angel had done.*

*The doors to his quarters slid open, and Gideon walked quietly through to his son's room, only to find that the bed was empty. His heart did a somersault, as a moment of panic swept over him. [Where the hell is he?] Then he realized that the answer was obvious.*

*Turning around, Gideon walked through his old living quarters and the connecting door to the new living room that he and Deborah had shared for the last three years. The lights there had been turned down low, but still provided enough illumination for him to look through the next open door, into the bedroom where his wife now slept without him.*

*Marcus lay fast asleep in his mother's arms. Deborah must have felt their son wake, and gone through to him, bringing him back to her room with her. Now she slept next to her son, holding him gently.*

*Gideon swallowed a lump at the sight of the two of them together. They were all that really mattered to him in the universe, all he really wanted. Nothing else was important to him. He would happily give up everything he owned, his job, his home, everything, if he could just have these two people back in his life, loving him and being loved. He stepped forward, then bent to kiss each of them gently on the forehead, before turning and going back to his narrow, empty bed.*

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*Demon's eyes opened as her husband left her bedroom. She had felt his return to their rooms, felt the emotional turmoil he suffered, felt his guilt and pain, and knew that it was all her fault. She knew that she was driving him away, but felt she had no choice. This was the only way to protect him and everyone she loved from what she now knew herself to be.*

*She had struggled for weeks with her depression and fear, and knew that she was losing the battle. Demon knew that she ought to be able to put this behind her, knew that she was hurting all the people she loved, but she couldn't find any other solution. She had to withdraw, had to freeze herself into immobility, to prevent the Vorlon inside her ever escaping her control again. There were times when Demon had wished she could find a way to kill herself quickly, to get it all over with, but she knew that her death would hurt her husband, her son and her sisters even more than her current withdrawal. Somehow, Demon had to find another way.*

*Knowing that she shouldn't, Demon stretched her senses, probing at Matthew's feelings, trying to understand what was driving his guilt. It wasn't just that he had lost his temper with her earlier, although Demon knew that he would be angry with himself about that. There was something else. Then she caught it. Underneath the guilt and pain was the merest whisper of satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction. Matthew had found comfort in another woman's arms and bed.*

*Demon wanted to scream with pain and jealousy, as she realized what had happened, but she quickly pulled herself back under control, telling herself that this was what she wanted. She loved her husband enough to want him to be happy. Knowing that she could no longer give him what he needed, wasn't it best if Matthew found someone who could give him that happiness? For a moment, Demon wondered who had comforted him. Who would Matthew turn to? He wouldn't consider a relationship with a woman in his line of command, so it would have to be one of the civilians on board.*

*Demon didn't know whether to laugh or cry when the answer came to her. It was so obvious. Matthew already loved Angel. Of course he would turn to her for solace. And although Demon couldn't read her sister's emotions as she could others, she knew that Angel loved Matthew too.*

*The tall blonde tried to tell herself that this was the perfect answer. Her husband and her sister would both be happy, and Marcus would be happy too, as he loved his Auntie Angel. Demon reached out and stroked her son's golden curls, wondering where she would find the strength to give him up. She ignored the tears that streamed down her face.*

## Part 2

*Gideon paced the floor of his bedroom--his son's bedroom--remembering a time when he had slept alone in this room, a time before he'd met Deborah, a time when he'd always been alone. He never wanted to go back to that time, but he was running out of ideas to prevent it.*

*When he'd awoken that morning, he'd gone through to the living room of Deborah's quarters, to find her sitting quietly at the dining table, giving Marcus his breakfast. As on previous days, there was only one plate on the table and only Marcus was eating. As soon as Gideon entered, Deborah had stood and moved to the kitchen, pouring a mug of coffee for him and bringing it to where he stood, silently, in the middle of the room. Gideon had felt like throwing the mug at the wall, watching it smash and its contents splash across the floor, but he'd taken it from her and thanked her quietly.*

*He'd joined his son at the dining table, and shortly thereafter, Deborah had brought him fresh toast and cereal. Gideon felt as if he was living in a high-class hotel. He didn't want his wife to serve him breakfast; he wanted her to love him. He wanted her to talk to him and Marcus, while eating her own breakfast, and telling him what she had planned for the day. He wanted Deborah back, not this pale shadow who sat ghostlike and silent across the table, head down, apparently staring at her own hands where they lay*

*unmoving in her lap.*

*Gideon had left soon after, going to the bridge and somehow getting through his day. He was aware that he was short-tempered, and that his XO had been keeping his crew and their issues away from him, not wishing to provoke one of the explosions of temper that the Captain had been prone to recently. Gideon was well aware that everyone was walking around him on tiptoes, and it irritated the hell out of him.*

*When his shift had ended, he'd gone to the gym to try and work off some of his frustrations, but shooting hoops, the rowing machine, and even a session pounding on a punch bag, had failed to relieve his tension. He'd arrived back at his quarters still strung out, and with a thundering tension headache. Again.*

*There had been a time when Deborah would sense his headaches, and she would massage his temples gently, while sending waves of love and calmness, until the pain went away. Those days were long gone. As far as Gideon could tell, Deborah kept her shields up all the time these days, blocking out everyone around her.*

*So yet again, Gideon had come home and changed, throwing his sweat soaked T-shirt into the laundry basket, then spending some time with his son, before silently eating the dinner that his wife had served but refused to eat. Tonight, Deborah had taken Marcus into her own room to get him ready for bed, and had stayed there with him, saying a quiet goodnight before firmly closing her bedroom door. [As if there's a chance of any night being good these days.] Gideon sighed to himself.*

*He dropped to his bunk, rubbing his forehead where the pain still pounded at his skull, trying to push away thoughts of where he could find relief for that pain. The memory of Angel's soothing touch was too dangerous, so he tried to distract himself with other thoughts. He had just about run out of ideas for where to go from here. Gideon found that his patience was not only wearing thin with his crew, but also with his wife. He knew that the problems that they were suffering weren't really her fault, but he found himself becoming increasingly impatient with Deborah's response. Why couldn't she move on? Learn to live with the knowledge she now had?*

*[And how would you cope with knowing you had an alien living inside you, Matt? How would you cope with the knowledge that everything you said and did was being watched by a being that had kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured you? Could you learn to live with that?]*

*Gideon was honest enough to admit that he probably couldn't. He just didn't know what he would have done about it. [Probably bashed my brains out against a wall, trying to get rid of it.] The thought made him shudder. This was Gideon's deepest fear, the one that made his head pound even harder. The fear that Deborah would find herself unable to live with what she now knew herself to be, and would find a way to kill herself.*

*He pushed himself up from the bed and started to pace the room again, gnawing at his problem like a rat in a trap, until he could no longer bear the confinement of his quarters. Grabbing his jacket from the bed, Gideon almost ran out of the room.*

*Gideon stared at the doors in front of him, fighting to keep his arm by his side, thinking back over the last couple of hours. He had prowled the ship, riding the bullet car, striding down corridors, scattering scared looking crew members in front of him. He had finally climbed the access ladder to the bullet car tube, where he had ridden Deborah's motorbike for an hour, back and forth along the tube, at reckless*



*speeds. He'd eventually stopped after coming close to driving the bike into the wall. Gideon had realized that a part of him had wanted that to happen, had wanted to hurt himself. [Am I really stupid enough to think that it would make her pay attention if I were hurt in some way? That she'd shake herself out of this depression if she thought she might lose me? God, that's pathetic, Matt!]*

*With those thoughts, he'd slowed the bike and taken it back to the ledge where it was stored, carefully replacing it on its stand. Then he had made his way down the access ladders into the main corridors and wandered again, before finding himself outside this door. Gideon discovered that his body had betrayed him while he was lost in thought, and he had pressed the call button. The door slid open, and Angel stood a few steps from him.*

*Her hair cascaded around her shoulders, her eyes were full of the warmth and love that he so desperately needed, and her lips smiled gently, an irresistible invitation to be kissed. Gideon found that he could not refuse them. Without a word he stepped forward and took Angel into his arms, kissing her deeply.*

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*The doors to the bullet car opened, and Gideon stepped into the empty carriage. This late in the ship's 'night', it was usually quiet and the cars usually empty, as he'd discovered the last three nights. On each of those nights he'd left his quarters, after spending hours unsuccessfully trying to sleep. Every night he'd paced the floor, telling himself that he would sleep eventually, that he had to stay in his rooms, that he shouldn't go to the one place on the ship where he could find the solace and peace he needed. Every night, he'd failed to convince himself, and on each of the last three nights he'd ended up in Angel's bed.*

*She had welcomed him warmly every time, taking Gideon into her arms and giving him what he so desperately needed. Angel gave him the warmth, affection and love that he no longer felt from his wife. After making love to Angel, Gideon found that he could sleep soundly in her arms, until the computer called him to warn him that his shift would start in an hour. Then he would return to his own room, shower and dress in his uniform, and eat breakfast with his son, while Deborah served them both silently.*

*[What the fuck do you think you're doing? How is this going to help? If you go on like this, you'll end up hurting Angel as well as Deborah. Haven't they both been hurt enough?] Gideon shook his head, wondering why he was so determined to destroy what little chance might remain of salvaging his marriage. [You love your wife, you idiot! Why are you throwing away what little possibility there might be of saving her and your marriage? Why are you so determined to make Angel suffer, too? Go home, you fool!]*

*Sitting up straight on the seat, Gideon called to redirect the bullet car back to the stop nearest his quarters. As soon as he had issued the order, the Captain felt as if a load had been lifted from his mind. He was going home, and he was going to sort things out. One way or another, he and Deborah were going to deal with the issues that lay between them.*

*When the bullet car arrived at his stop, Gideon almost ran from the car, charging down the corridor and into Deborah's quarters, flinging open the door to her bedroom. Marcus lay alone in the large bed, fast asleep, with Half-Ted grasped firmly in his arms. Deborah wasn't there.*

*A wave of grief washed over Gideon, but for once the grief wasn't his own. He spun on his heel, drawn to the open door behind him, the door that connected Deborah's quarters to his old rooms. He strode through the door, through his old living room and on into the bedroom where he had spent the previous two months sleeping alone, noting as he went that the lights in his old quarters had been dimmed. Gideon stopped dead in the doorway to his old bedroom, stunned by what he saw there.*

*Deborah was curled up on his bunk, her head buried in his pillow, sobbing into it, while she sent waves of grief and pain that almost overwhelmed Gideon as he stood by the door. Her hair covered the parts of her face not concealed by the pillow, but Gideon had no doubt that she was crying bitterly. Her sobs were deep, gut wrenching gasps of pain, which shook her whole body. She was so lost in misery that she hadn't noticed his arrival.*

*Gideon ran across the room and pulled his wife into his arms, hugging her tightly to him, as he rocked her. The moment he touched her, she stiffened and tried to pull away, but he held on to her, refusing to let her go. After a few moments, Deborah stopped struggling and went limp in his arms, still gasping for air as she tried to bring herself under control. Gideon loosened his hold on her slightly, and lifted her face to look at her.*

*Her eyes were red and swollen from crying, her nose ran and her cheeks were tear stained. But worse was the look of complete despair in her eyes as she whispered, "Send me away, Matthew. Please send me away. I promised you that I'd never leave you, so I can't go unless you tell me to. I know where you've been every night. It's OK, you'll be happier with Angel. She can love you and Marcus now, better than I can. You should divorce me and marry her. She'll be a better wife for you and mother for Marcus. Marcus loves Angel, too. You must send me away, send me away..." Her voice faded into a continuous mumbling of the same words over and over. Gideon pulled his wife back into his arms, rocking her as he hugged her tightly, his own tears wetting her hair as he held her.*

*The guilt Gideon felt at Deborah's knowledge of where he had been and what he had been doing almost overwhelmed him as he gasped, "I can't, I won't. You have to stay. Stay with me, Deborah. Don't leave me. You promised you'd never leave me." Gideon could barely get the words out as he cried. He felt Deborah's arms go around his shoulders and she clung to him, desperately, still sending waves of grief, but now her pain was threaded through with love. Gideon wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry as he realized that his wife still loved him. Despite everything that had happened, despite all the stupid things he'd said and done, she still loved him. He clung to that one fact as hard as he clung to Deborah. If she still loved him, there was hope.*

*Gideon pushed Deborah away and stared at her, his sight blurred with tears. "Feel what I'm feeling now. Tell me what I'm feeling."*

*Deborah swallowed hard as she closed her eyes. Then she whispered, "Guilt. Oh, please, don't feel guilty, Matthew. There's nothing to feel guilty about..."*

*Gideon placed his fingers to her lips to stop her. "What else? Tell me, what else am I feeling?"*

*Deborah looked at him sadly. "You're angry, and you're sad. And frightened. Very frightened." Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke.*

*Gideon nodded and swallowed hard to contain his own tears. "Yes. All of that. I'm angry with the Vorlon who did this to you. And I'm sad at what has been done to you and what you've done to yourself these last two months. But most of all, I'm frightened that I'm going to lose you." His control collapsed, and Gideon buried his head in Deborah's hair. He wept, feeling her shed tears with him.*

*Their sobs finally subsided, and Gideon again loosened his grip on his wife. He looked into her face as she looked up at him, lifting a hand to wipe away her latest tears and trying to smile at her. "Why are you in here? What made you come?"*

*Deborah tucked her head into his shoulder and hugged him tightly. He could only just hear her whispered reply. "I've come here every night after you left. The bed was still warm from where you'd been lying on it, and the pillow was warm where your head had been. So I came here to curl up in the warmth you left behind. It's the only place I could get warm. It's so cold, Matthew. I've been so cold."*

*Gideon rocked his wife gently, rubbing his hands along her back and her arms, feeling the goose bumps there. Her skin was icy beneath the material of the T-shirt she wore. He pulled the covers from the bed around her, covering her bare legs, kissing her face gently, trying to warm her as she lay in his arms. Deborah lay still, allowing him to warm her, as she slowly stopped sending the waves of grief and pain that had assailed them both since he'd entered the room.*

*When he finally felt Deborah stop shivering, Gideon lifted her face again, smiling at her gently. "That explains why you're in my bed, but I don't understand why you're wearing my shirt." He ran his hand over the material of the red T-shirt his wife was wearing. It left her arms bare and only covered the top of her thighs. There was no way it could keep her warm.*

*Deborah lowered her head again, burying her face in his chest as she whispered, "It smells of you. I couldn't sleep without something that smelled of you in bed with me, so every night I've taken your T-shirt from the laundry basket, and I've slept in it. "*

*Gideon was torn between laughter and tears as he held her, finally saying, "Oh Deborah, my love. Don't you know that if you want something that smells of me in your bed, you can have me? All of me. Any time you want me." He pulled her up in his arms and started to kiss her face, her eyes, her cheeks, her nose and finally her lips.*

*At first, Deborah didn't react. She lay unmoving, no longer trying to get away from him, but not responding either. Then Gideon felt her mouth open under his, and the ice thawed. Her kisses became passionate and her hands moved frantically around his body, trying to pull him tighter to her, clearly signaling her need to have him holding her, kissing her, making love to her.*

*Gideon pulled away the covers that he had wrapped around his wife, then slowly removed the T-shirt from her now warm body. He refused to allow himself to feel the pain that seeing her thinness caused him. Her ribs stood out clearly against her pale skin, and her hip bones jutted out either side of her belly. Deborah's legs and arms were almost like twigs where she had lost even more weight than he'd guessed.*

*Hearing her gasp, Gideon looked up at Deborah's face and saw that her eyes had filled with tears again. "You think I'm ugly, don't you? You don't want me any more."*

*Gideon realized that she had picked up his distress at seeing her so thin. He quickly tried to reassure her, holding her closely, kissing her over and over, telling her that he loved her. When Deborah had calmed a little, he looked deeply into her eyes and gave her a sad smile. "I'll always love you, no matter how you look, but I want you to promise me that you'll start eating again. I love you best when there's more of you to love."*

*He moved Deborah gently, until she lay next to him on the bunk, then he stood to remove his own clothes, longing to make love to her again, to show her how much he loved her and how much he'd missed her. She watched him as he undressed, and reached out to hold him as he lay down next to her on the narrow bunk. Gideon started to caress his wife's body, feeling her respond to his touches. Then she froze, going rigid in his arms.*

Gideon looked down at Deborah as she lay next to him, staring up at him, her eyes enormous in her thin face. "What's the matter? Don't you want to?" He asked, gently.

"I want to. I want you. But it's watching. It's always watching. I don't think I can if I know it's watching." Deborah's words were a terrified whisper, reminding Gideon that their problems hadn't gone away. The Vorlon was still there.

He smiled at her and reached for the T-shirt he had just removed. "We can fix that." He tore the T-shirt into strips, then bound one of the strips around Deborah's eyes. "If you can't see, then it can't see either."

Deborah laughed, hesitantly at first, then reached out for Gideon, pulling him down on top of her, whispering, "Make love to me, Matthew. Please."

He made love to her gently, lifting her and himself to a quiet climax. Not one of their mind-blowing orgasms, but a gentle outpouring of love and affection, a sharing of tenderness and caring. Then he took the blindfold from Deborah's eyes, and she lay in his arms and cried herself to sleep.

Gideon drifted into sleep, only to find himself somewhere strange: a huge hall, seeming to be constructed entirely of ice. The ceiling towered hundreds of meters over his head, and the walls seemed as far away as the ceiling. The floor underfoot was ice, its white surface scratched and dulled, but it was still slippery when Gideon tried to walk. He turned, carefully, slowly, looking to see if there was anything else in the hall of ice, other than him. At the far end of the hall, he could just see...something. He couldn't make it out in detail, but there seemed to be a block of ice nearly the same color as the hall, with something black in front of it. Proceeding with great care, Gideon set out to discover what it was.

As he approached, the black thing became clearer. It was a child, a young girl with long, blonde, curly hair, dressed all in black, who was sitting on the steps of a throne made of ice. A woman sat on the throne, wearing robes as white as the ice on which she sat, a white veil covering the upper half of her face. The woman and the throne were encased in transparent ice, which bent the light and distorted the image within.

Gideon squatted in front of the child and asked quietly, "Are you all right?"

The little girl looked up at him, her golden brown eyes enormous in her too thin face, but she didn't speak. The voice that Gideon heard came from the block of ice surrounding the throne. He looked up and couldn't see the woman's lips moving within the ice, but he heard her voice clearly in his head.

"She will not speak. We did not create her to speak."

Gideon stood and looked at the woman in the ice. She had obviously heard his question, but had she heard his words or his thoughts? He decided to continue speaking aloud.

"So what did you create her for?" He glanced down at the child and saw that she had changed. In the few seconds when his attention had been drawn away from her, she had aged years. Now an adolescent sat on the steps of the throne. Her hair was still a tangle of pale blonde curls, but her face had grown and changed. Her mouth and eyes were still too big for her face and her nose was too long for her ever to be considered pretty, but the bones that still showed too clearly in her face held the promise of beauty to come. Her long, thin legs were encased in black jeans and small breasts stretched the tight black T-shirt she

wore. Gideon guessed that she would be about sixteen, and he recognized her now. This was Deborah as she had been once. This was his wife, but a younger version of herself.

Gideon knelt on the cold ice and lifted his hand to Deborah's face, flinching back as he felt the ice-cold skin of her cheek. He looked up at the woman on the throne as she answered his question.

"As a tool for our use. As a weapon against our enemies. We created her and molded her to our purposes. She was never intended to be anything more than a weapon."

Gideon looked back at his wife and saw that she had aged again. Now she looked as she had done when they had first met. Her hair was a shade darker but she was still dressed in the black jeans, her proportions now more womanly, her hips wider, her legs more shapely, her larger breasts stretching her black T-shirt further. As he looked into her face, he saw a tear form and fall from her eye, turning to ice as it touched her frozen cheek. Gideon desperately wanted to take her into his arms, to warm her, somehow to bring her to life, but her skin was so cold that it burned him when he tried to touch her.

He looked up at the woman on the throne and begged, "Let her go. Don't do this to her. She's not cold; she's not made of ice. She's a real, living, breathing, loving human being, and my son and I both need her. Don't take her away from us."

The sound in Gideon's head almost seemed like a sigh. He wondered whether he'd somehow got through when the woman answered, "It was not supposed to be this way. We bred her and planned her life to isolate her from her peers. She was never supposed to learn how to love. But her father disobeyed our orders and made her aware of her sister, who we had also bred for service. When they came together, this child learned things she was never meant to know. By the time we took her and her sister for their final training, it was too late. Our creations were flawed. We thought that by implanting a part of one of us within this child, then leaving the sisters in stasis while it worked on her, we could correct the flaw."

Gideon tore his eyes away from his wife for a moment, to look up at the frozen woman. "Us? Are you a Vorlon?"

When he looked back, Deborah had changed again. Her face was older, fine lines appearing around her eyes, her hair lighter as silver strands emerged from amongst the gold. The frozen tear still rested on her cheek, and her golden brown eyes were filled with pain and loss. Gideon's heart nearly broke as he looked into the face of the woman his wife could so easily become.

The woman in the ice replied, "Part of one. A human vessel is not strong enough to carry more than a part. Most are not strong enough to carry any part of us, but this one was bred for the task. She was raised to embrace order over chaos, to consider logic more important than emotion, to think and not to feel. She was to be the controller, the director, following our orders without thought or question. Her father ruined her for that task. We thought to destroy her and the other parts of our weapon, her sisters, but we decided to give them a second chance. Despite our best efforts, the universe moved on, leaving this part of us behind."

Gideon glanced up at the woman in the ice, for a moment unsure if he had heard a note of regret in her voice, a tone that was almost wistful. Did the Vorlon feel alone? Abandoned and left behind by its fellows when they went beyond the Rim? Gideon knew that feeling all too well. The damage done when the Cerberus had left him behind would never completely heal, but with Deborah's help and love, he had moved beyond the pain, and the nightmares no longer haunted him.

*The prospect of losing his wife to the depression and pain she had endured these last two months, of living estranged from her again, was too painful to contemplate. Somehow, he had to get this thing, this Vorlon, to leave. If John Sheridan, his hero, had persuaded the whole Vorlon race to leave the galaxy, surely he could talk a part of one Vorlon into leaving his wife alone?*

*"So what happens now? Do you stay, lurking in Deborah's head, spying on us, living vicariously through her? If you do that, you'll kill her. She can't live with the knowledge that you're there. I think she'll kill herself soon, if we don't find a way to get you out of her." Gideon felt his throat closing as he spoke. The prospect of losing Deborah was too much to bear. He wondered how he could live without her, how he would raise Marcus alone, but he knew that despite their reconciliation, he had spoken the truth. Deborah wouldn't be able to live with herself for much longer. If Gideon couldn't get this Vorlon to leave, he would lose his wife.*

*"She will die whether she holds one of us or not. The only difference is when. Will she die sooner or later? In our terms, her period of her life would always be short, but we are not cruel, we do not wish our creatures to die before their time. Departure is a possibility but there are consequences. Do you wish to know the consequences of us leaving her?"*

*Gideon nodded and looked back at his wife. She was now an old woman, her face lined, the skin stretched taut across the bones of her skull, her hair completely silver, but she was still beautiful to him. He loved the bones that were now as clearly displayed as when she had been a child. He loved the way she still held her head high and proud, but most of all he loved her warm, golden brown eyes, that had never wavered from his face while he had talked to the Vorlon, that had showed all the feelings her frozen face had hidden. Gideon knew then that he would love his wife until the day he died, no matter how near or far away that day might be.*

*The Vorlon voice sounded in his head. "If we depart, she will lose all her powers. She will no longer know what others feel, nor be able to send her feelings. She will not be able to merge with her sisters or speak to them with her mind. She will no longer be linked to her son. Her sisters will also lose their powers. The telekinetic will no longer be able to move objects, the partial telepath will not be able to block minds or glimpse the future, and the shape shifter will be frozen into the form she has on our departure. They will all pay this price. Will you decide for them? Shall we depart now?"*

*Gideon looked at the woman in the ice in horror. He could never make that decision for Deborah, never mind her sisters. And how would Marcus cope with being cut off from his mother so abruptly? He whispered, "I'll love her with or without her abilities, but I can't make that decision for her or her sisters. Are those really the only alternatives? You stay and she dies, or you go and take with you nearly everything that makes her who she is. Is there nothing in between?"*

*"No." The answer came back like lightning, and Gideon became angry.*

*"No? Is that all? Just 'No'? You bred these women for your own purposes, sentient beings who have thoughts and feelings, hearts and souls, yet you tortured them to bring out their abilities, you punished them when they wouldn't kill for you, then abandoned them to be abused by whoever found them and after all that, you just say 'No'. I thought you bastards were supposed to be the good guys? I thought it was the Shadows who killed and tortured, but it seems that you're as bad as they were. You're going to sit by and watch Deborah, the woman you created and molded, my wife and the mother of my son, kill herself because she can't live with what you've done to her. Is that logical? Or orderly? It doesn't make any sense to me, and the universe will be a worse place without her, a sadder place and a place where chaos has destroyed one more thing of beauty."*

Hearing a soft sigh, he looked back to see that Deborah had dropped her head. He could no longer see her face where it was covered with curtains of silver hair, but her hands were still gently clasped around her knees. Gideon could almost feel the exhaustion so clearly displayed by his wife's pose. He wondered whether this came from her or from the being that lived inside her. The being so old that perhaps it would welcome the oblivion of death and departure.

The voice spoke softly. "There is a middle way. It would mean that we are trapped in her body until she dies, but that is a short enough time to us. We would shut down. In your terms, we would enter a state you might call hibernation and not emerge until she dies. We would still be here, giving her the power that lies beneath her abilities, the power to feel and send, the power to link with her sisters and her son, but not enough to merge completely. That would be denied them all. We would no longer be able to protect them from their enemies, and they would never again be able to become the single entity, the weapon we created. Her sisters' abilities would be maintained, but their links to each other would be diminished. In time, they would no longer be able to speak to each other with their minds, but the transition would be gradual. Is this what you want?"

Gideon suppressed his feelings of triumph and looked up at the Vorlon, considering. He still felt he had no right to make this decision for Deborah and her sisters. "They'll need to decide for themselves. I'll talk to Deborah and see if she can live with knowing that you're still there, if she can be sure that you're... asleep."

For the first time, the woman moved. Her head bowed slightly within the ice. Gideon wasn't sure if it was a nod or a dismissal, but when he looked back at Deborah she had gone. No one sat on the steps of the throne any more, and for a moment, Gideon wanted to scream with the pain of loss at her absence. Then he realized what this could mean. Perhaps the Vorlon had released her. Perhaps Deborah was no longer a prisoner in this frozen place. Perhaps she had been set free to resume her life.

He whispered, "Thank you. I think," and closed his eyes.

Gideon sat up in bed abruptly, taking a deep breath and rubbing his arms, still covered in goose bumps from the cold of the ice hall. Deborah stirred in her sleep beside him, and rolled from her side onto her back. Gideon gazed at her in the dim light shining through the bedroom door, letting his eyes feast on each part of her, reminding himself just how much he loved her. From her golden hair to her golden brown eyes, her long nose and high cheekbones, her full lips and firm jaw, her long neck and broad shoulders, the full roundness of her breasts and the narrowing of her waist, the swell of her hips and the length of her legs, there wasn't a thing about her that he didn't love. Her bones may have been showing all too clearly at that moment, but Gideon swore to himself that he would soon help her recover. He wouldn't lose her again. She was too precious to him and to their son. Somehow, he would persuade her to live with the compromise the Vorlon had suggested.

The Captain took his wife into his arms and kissed her gently as she slept. Then he started to work out how he would tell her everything he had learned. Tomorrow was going to be another long day.

Squeezing his wife's hand tightly, Gideon tried not to let her sense the anxiety he felt.

When they had woken that morning, still holding each other tightly in the narrow bunk where their son

*usually slept, he had told Deborah about his dream. She had listened quietly, her head tucked under his chin as he held her, not reacting to what he said until he finished. Then she had looked up at him, her fear showing clearly in her eyes, as she whispered, "I have to speak to my sisters. Not just link to them, but speak to them, and Ilas will need to be involved."*

*Gideon had nodded and kissed her gently, before they had both become aware of the noises emanating from their bedroom next door. Marcus was awake, and he was crying.*

*Deborah had half fallen out of bed, grabbing the covers around her as she ran through the connecting door to be with her son. Gideon had taken a few moments to pull on some clothes, then followed, to find his wife holding Marcus tightly, making soothing noises, telling the little boy over and over that she was sorry, that she loved him and that she would never leave him. Marcus clung to his mother's neck so tightly that Gideon wondered how she could breathe, never mind speak. Gradually, the child's crying had diminished, and he had looked over his mother's shoulder at his father, and smiled tentatively. Gideon could barely make out the words that his son whispered, but he heard enough to make him want to weep again.*

*"Mummy loves me again!"*

*The Captain had swept his wife and son into his arms and hugged them tightly, vowing to himself that he would never let them go, never let anything come between them again. Then he had disentangled himself from their grasp, taken Marcus in his arms and kissed him, telling Deborah to get herself dressed while he got them all breakfast.*

*While Deborah had not been her old self during the meal, she had at least eaten something, and had tried to smile and reassure her son. She had taken Marcus to the Medbay crèche, while Gideon had called Lily and Angel, asking them to come to his quarters, and asking John and Luke to join them. Then he had made arrangements with Jackson to cover for him and John while they met, and asked his communications officer to put a call out for Max, Ilas and Dureena.*

*Now he sat, holding Deborah's hand tightly, while they waited for the other members of their family to join them, and for the call from Ilas to come through.*

*Deborah had said very little since she'd returned from Medbay. She had been deep in thought, but at least she hadn't locked herself under control, putting on the frozen mask that Gideon had come to hate so much. She had allowed him to see her fear, but he was doing his best not to let her see his. He was still scared that neither of the offers made by the Vorlon would be acceptable to her and that she would leave him and Marcus, in spirit if not in body.*

*The door buzzer attracted their attention away from each other, and Gideon called for the door to open.*

*Demon listened in silence as Gideon explained his dream to her family. The call to Ilas had come through soon after Lily, Luke, John and Angel had arrived, and Ilas, Max and Dureena all watched and listened from the viewscreen. Demon knew this was a decision she couldn't take alone. It affected all her sisters, and they had to be involved in deciding the best way forward. But she also knew that one of the alternatives offered was unacceptable to her.*

*When Matthew had finished, there was a long silence. Angel was the first to speak. "Get rid of it, Demon. Make it go away and leave you alone. You have to get it out of you, completely."*



*Demon looked at her younger sister, sitting in the large armchair in the corner, and wanted to cry. Angel knew what she would have to give up, but she was willing to make that sacrifice for the sake of her older sister. Within seconds, Lily and Ilas had agreed.*

*"It's the only way, Demon. You can't go on with it inside you. If it's willing to leave, let it go." Lily stood and moved across the room to where Demon sat at the dining table, taking her big sister into her arms and hugging her.*

*Demon laid her head on her tiny sister's shoulder. She couldn't sense her sisters' feelings as she did others, but the warmth of Lily's embrace said it all. She heard Ilas' voice from the viewscreen saying, "Of course you must. It's the only sensible thing to do."*

*Demon felt her husband squeeze her hand again, and looked up to see him nodding. John and Luke sat on the sofa, and they too were agreeing.*

*"No."*

*The word hung in the air, the silence after it was spoken lengthening, until Demon cleared her throat and spoke again. "No." Everyone started talking at once, but Demon held up her free hand, and they soon stopped. Lily looked at her in surprise, then went back to join her men, sitting on the sofa.*

*Demon looked around the room, trying to keep her voice steady as she went on, "I won't ask you to give up your powers for me." She silenced the voices again with a look. Turning to her sisters one by one, she said, "Lily, I know you wouldn't miss the sights, and you could give up the ability to block telepaths easily enough, but I won't ask you to give up the links to your children. Those are too precious to lose. Angel, you've given up so much, I won't ask you to give up your telekinesis, too."*

*Demon looked at her younger sister, knowing that Angel understood her. Angel was giving up any chance she might have of future happiness with Matthew and Marcus, and she was offering to give up her powers, too. Demon wouldn't--couldn't--let her sister do that. She clung onto Matthew's hand, her lifeline to some sort of future she could live with, and continued, "Angel, one day you may have children of your own, and I want you to have the same chance that Lily, Ilas and I have had. The chance to share your child's thoughts and feelings. I won't deprive you of that."*

*Angel rushed across the room and threw herself into her older sister's arms, hugging her tightly. Demon held Angel close with one arm, still hanging onto Matthew's hand as if her life depended on it. Which it might.*

*When Angel calmed enough to return to her seat, Demon turned to Ilas, who had watched her sisters from the viewscreen, with Max and Dureena sitting either side of her, silently giving their support to the little shape-shifter. Demon forced a smile to her face as she looked fondly at her youngest sister. Ilas had grown up so much in the years since she had left her sisters, traveling the galaxy in quest of information on her people, bringing up Vya, her son, building her relationship with Max and Dureena until it stood as solid as a tripod on level ground, despite some rocky times along the way.*

*"Ilas, I have no idea what losing the power to shape-shift would be like for you. I know it would hurt and diminish you, and it might well hurt Vya, too. That's not an acceptable solution."*

*Demon turned to her husband as he squeezed her hand again. Matthew asked quietly, "Is the alternative*

*acceptable, then? Can you live with knowing that the Vorlon is still inside you, Deborah? Knowing that even if it's dormant, it's still there? Please, be very sure about this. We can't go through this again. Marcus and I can't handle the prospect of losing you again." He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it gently.*

*Demon wanted to cry as she saw the pain in his eyes, felt his sorrow at all she had put him through in the last few weeks. She vowed that somehow she would make it all up to him. Somehow, she would find a way to thank him for finding her a solution.*

*"Yes. I'll learn to live with it. As long as I know it's not watching me, not ready to attack the people I love, I can handle it."*

*Luke cleared his throat. "Just for the record, it didn't attack Angel, or even the Emperor. It attacked the Keepers that had been attached to them. And it only emerged when we tried to take you away from Matthew. I don't know whether it would have intervened if your life had been directly threatened, Demon, but it only actually attacked when you thought you were going to lose Matthew."*

*Demon dropped her head and whispered, "I know. That's what scares me. How do I know that it won't attack someone, anyone, who threatens someone I love? But if I know that it's dormant, I'll deal with that somehow." She felt Matthew squeeze her hand again, to gain her attention. She looked up at him and saw his concern written clearly on his face as he spoke.*

*"Deborah, are you sure you can't live with it as it is? If it were driven to attack to protect me, perhaps it would also defend you. I hate to take that possible defense away from you. Who knows when you might need it?"*

*Demon shook her head. "I can't bear the thought of it watching me, watching everything I do, think and feel. I think I can cope with knowing that it's dormant." She saw Matthew's concern at her uncertainty and spoke more firmly. "I know I can. As long as it's not watching and not active, I can live with it." Demon did her best to project certainty and confidence, but then became less sure as she asked, "But how do we contact it again?" She looked at her husband and smiled gently. "Do we have to wait for you to go to sleep again? Or should we get Luke to knock you out with something?" She knew that as humor it was a pretty weak, but at least it was a start.*

*Matthew gripped her hand tightly and smiled in appreciation. "That wouldn't be my first choice. Does anyone have any other ideas?"*

*John lifted his hand. "If the Vorlon is the source of energy behind the sisters powers, then it's probably a part of them when they merge to become...well, whatever it is they become when they merge."*

*Demon nodded. When she merged with her sisters, enough of her own personality remained to remember what had gone on during the merge. With hindsight, she could now see that there has always been something more, something extra, that had driven the merge. It was the thing that she'd always had to fight, to stay in control, to prevent it doing harm and making them the weapon they were designed to be. She spoke softly to John, asking, "Could you speak to it for us, John? When we merge, could you join us telepathically and tell it what we want?"*

*John nodded. "It may not be necessary, but if it is, of course I'll do what I can."*

*Demon stood shakily and made her way to the center of the room, holding her hands out to her sisters.*

*Just before they touched, she turned to look at Ilas in the viewscreen, saying, "Darling, I know that you can't merge with us from where you are, but close your eyes and think of us. We may be able to make a tenuous link."*

*Ilas nodded and closed her eyes. Demon took her sisters hands, standing in a triangle in the center of the room. She took a deep breath, closed her eyes and initiated the merge.*

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*John watched carefully as the three sisters closed their eyes and joined hands, focusing on the mental emanations flowing from the trio. He had seen them merge three times before. First, when Ilas had left the merge and Angel rejoined them, later when Sarah Chambers had given birth and again above Stryvsteptix. Each time, he had been taken by surprise and had not had chance to observe the process closely. This time, he opened all his senses, hoping that he could catch something, anything, before Lily's block kicked into effect.*

*This time he caught it. A surge of power, a sense of something else, something alien, just as the three distinct personalities blended into one. Then he could sense nothing, not even the other people in the room. The telepathic block Lily projected dropped into place.*

*John sighed to himself. [Well, if I can't use my telepathic powers, I can at least observe with my eyes and ears, like everyone else.] What he saw next reminded him of the previous times the sisters had merged, but now it made more sense. Each time before, the women had been surrounded by white light. Sometimes it had been in the form of beams connecting the sisters to each other and to a source of power. When Sarah's baby had been born, it had taken the form of a glowing field of brightness. This time, the white light took form as it surrounded the sisters. It became a multi-tentacled being, swooping and diving around and through the sisters. John realized that he was one of the few people in the galaxy to see a Vorlon in its true form.*

*The being coiled itself around the trio, then seemed to shrink and focus on Demon, disappearing into her. As John watched, Demon's eyes began to glow. The brightness of the glow increased, until it became too painful to look directly into her eyes. Glancing at Lily and Angel, John could see that they had their eyes tightly shut, but they still held onto each other and Demon. He took a quick look at the viewscreen and saw that Ilas had slumped forward, apparently unconscious. Max and Dureena held her upright, their concern for their partner etched into their faces.*

*The voice that emerged from Demon's open mouth was not hers. It was deeper, flatter, more masculine, having none of the throaty musicality that made Demon's voice so distinctive and pleasurable to listen to. This was like the voice she used when she had herself sternly under control, but even more so. This was the voice of the being that had inhabited her for so long, unsuspected by them all.*

*"Choose. Now." The imperious tone of the command raised the hackles on the back of John's neck and he could see his Captain almost snarling in response. It was obvious that Gideon detested and abhorred the creature controlling his wife's body. John wondered whether his Captain and friend could live with the knowledge that the Vorlon was still inside Demon, even though dormant.*

*"The sisters have decided that you should sleep. If it had been my choice, it might have been different. My choice would have been to...never mind. Just go hibernate and leave them alone. Don't expect an alarm call." Gideon's hatred of the Vorlon was as clear from his tone as from his words.*

*"Yes. Know this. These children would have lived longer lives had they accepted our presence. We now*

*withdraw our ability to defend them from their enemies, from disease and from the effects of age. So be it." Demon's head bowed before anyone could speak, and the light left her eyes.*

*All three sisters started to crumple, and the men leaped to catch them. John caught Lily and swept her into his arms, barely aware that Luke was holding Angel upright, and Gideon was carefully lowering Demon to the floor. Lily's eyes fluttered open, and John once again felt himself drowning in their emerald depths. She murmured, "Sweet-Face," then dropped her head to his shoulder and slept.*

*John turned as Luke spoke, watching him as he half carried Angel to the sofa, and laid her on it gently. "I think the best thing we can all do now is to let them sleep." He glanced up at the viewscreen and smiled as he saw that Max was holding Ilas closely, cradling her in his arms. "Let her sleep it off, Max. I'm sure she'll be fine when she wakes up." John wondered for a moment how Luke could be so sure. Then he smiled to himself. Doctor's were trained to sound certain, even when they weren't.*

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## *Epilogue*

*Gideon stood outside the doorway, hesitating once more. His hand dropped to his side, and he started to turn away, thinking that this may not be a good time. He'd taken no more than three steps down the corridor, when he halted abruptly. There was never going to be a good time. Whenever he did it, it was going to be painful, but it had to be done. He owed... He turned on his heel and walked back to the door, hitting the call button before he could change his mind again. The door slid open.*

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*Angel looked at the man standing in the doorway and sighed. She'd known that this moment would come, known that he would feel it necessary to see her. She even knew what he was going to say, and knew that it had to be said. None of that had stopped her hoping that this moment would never come. Nothing could stop the dreams in which Gideon came to her with a different message, came to Angel to tell her that he loved and needed her, that he wanted to be with her always, that he was leaving...*

*The young witch stopped her thoughts dead at that point. She shouldn't and wouldn't go there. She would be happy for her sister. Happy that Demon was slowly recovering from the knowledge that she carried a Vorlon within her.*

*In the days since the Vorlon had agreed to withdraw into sleep, Angel had spent many hours with her older sister, encouraging her to eat, helping her talk about what she had been through, giving Demon all the love and support that she needed on her slow road to recovery. In those days, Angel had managed to avoid Gideon almost completely, arranging her shifts so that she worked in Medbay when Gideon was off-duty, and could spend time with Demon during his work shifts. This wasn't just to make sure that Demon had company and support at all times. It allowed Angel to avoid seeing the man she wanted. And she did want Gideon. She wanted him as she had only ever wanted one man before. As she never expected to want any man again.*

*So she sighed softly, as she looked at Gideon standing in the open doorway, saying quietly, "Hello, Matt. Why don't you come in and sit down, while I make us some coffee?"*

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*Gideon waited impatiently for Angel to emerge from the kitchen area, unwilling to start talking until he had her complete attention. He knew that he could only find the courage to do this once. He couldn't afford to have to repeat himself. It would be so easy to give way, so easy to take Angel into his arms, to comfort her, to kiss her, to make love... Gideon shook his head, pushing those thoughts from his mind.*

*He stared at his feet, as he sat on the edge of the chair, trying to focus on what he had to say. But his mind wandered, remembering how Angel had looked as he'd entered her quarters. Her raven hair had fallen loose around her shoulders, the soft curls caressing her neck, as he longed to caress it. Her long, black eyelashes had gently touched her cheeks as she lowered her eyes, and the desire to press his lips to those same cheeks had almost overwhelmed Gideon. It had taken all his willpower not to take her into his arms at that moment, and only slightly less willpower not to run from her, fleeing the temptation she presented.*

*Gideon knew he couldn't do that. That wouldn't be fair to Angel, to him or to Deborah. The mess he had created within his family had to be cleaned up, and it was his job to do it. [Matthew Gideon, janitor extraordinary.] he laughed bitterly to himself at his own thoughts.*

*He looked up, as Angel walked back into the living area, holding a cup in each hand. She placed his coffee on the small table, then retreated to the sofa, sitting and tucking her feet beneath her, as she raised her cup and took a sip. Gideon couldn't help noticing how the loose red robe she wore was pulled tight across her breasts, as she leaned forward to place her cup on the table. He quickly dropped his eyes to the cup in front of him, focusing his attention on the dark liquid within, as he gathered his thoughts. Angel waited in silence, giving him time to think.*

*Taking a deep breath, Gideon started talking, still staring into the depths of his untouched coffee. "I came to thank you. I owe you a lot, Angel." He looked up and was deeply distressed when he saw that tears had formed in Angel's bright blue eyes.*

*Before he could speak again, Angel whispered, "You don't owe me anything, Matt. What we did..." She swallowed, unable to continue for a moment, and Gideon quickly interrupted.*

*"What we did was wonderful. You'll never know how much I needed what you gave me. I shouldn't have let you give so much, but I couldn't help myself. I needed to feel loved, wanted, needed. You gave me all of that. I'll never forget that, and I'll always love you, Angel."*

*There. It was out now. He'd said the words that he'd wanted to say. The words that had been left unsaid for too long. Finally, after all the long years of resisting, Gideon had told Angel how he felt. He loved her.*

*Angel looked up at him and tried to smile, but he could see that she was struggling with her emotions. Gideon gave her time to pull herself under control, waiting while she took several more sips of her coffee. Then she put the cup down on the table, took a deep breath and started to speak. Angel's voice trembled at first, but strengthened as she spoke.*

*"I never thought I'd hear you say that, Matt. Thank you. I'm sure you know that I love you, too. I think I always will. But I also know that you love Demon. I know that the two of you are meant for each other, that you will always be together. Maybe in another time or place, in another universe, things could have been different. But here and now, in this universe, you and my sister belong together, and you always will. I know that what you and Demon have is for life, for ever and ever." Gideon watched in silence as Angel took a deep breath and continued, "I'm happy that I could be there for you when you needed it, and I'm happy that Demon is recovering now. Just give me a little time, and I might even be able to stop crying*

*when I think about how happy I am." Tears were streaming down Angel's face as she finally ran out of words.*

*Gideon leaped from his seat and ran to her, taking Angel into his arms and holding her as she cried. He didn't kiss her, didn't caress her as he longed to, just held her as she cried, trying to pretend to himself that this was what a brother would do, comforting his sister in her distress. Particularly when he had been the cause of that distress.*

*Eventually, Angel stopped crying and lifted her head, trying to smile as she said, "Maybe one day I'll be lucky enough to find someone who I can love as much as Demon loves you, and who will love me as much as you love Demon. Maybe one day."*

*Gideon smiled sadly, and raised his hand to wipe the tears from her beautiful face. "I hope so, Angel. No one deserves that more than you do." He gradually pulled back, then stood, looking down at the young witch as she lay back on the sofa. The Captain pushed aside every desire, every longing, every passionate thought he had for his wife's sister. He told himself that just for once he should focus on her needs, not his.*

*What Angel needed more than anything was clarity. She needed to know that he loved her, but that their relationship would now shift to another level, no longer filled with the ambiguity and tension that had always strained things between them. They had fought, they had teased and flirted, they had been enemies and they had been lovers. Now they could be more than the sum of all those things. Now they could be what they had tried to be, often pretended to be, but had never really been. They could be friends.*

*Gideon stooped to take Angel's hand, and kissed it gently. "Thank you, Angel. Thank you for everything."*

*Angel smiled up at him, her tears drying as she said, "Go home, Matt. Go home to Demon and love her. That's what she needs now, and that's what will make her happy. That's what we all want and need now. Demon has been through enough. Make her happy, Matt."*

*Gideon swallowed hard, loving Angel more every moment, but loving her as a friend. He nodded and smiled back. "I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to do just that. Goodnight, Angel, and sweet dreams."*

*The Captain left Angel's rooms and walked back to the quarters he shared with his wife, determined that he would never again do anything that would make his wife unhappy. Gideon knew that he would fail. He knew that he would do things to annoy Deborah, to upset her and to infuriate her. He knew that there would be fights and spats, disagreements, reconciliations and long lazy days full of lovemaking, as they reaffirmed their love for one another.*

*That was what life with Deborah was like. That was why he loved her. It was time to go home and remind her how much.*

{Chapter 1}

*{Part 1: The Last Tango in Geneva}* *{Part 2: End of the Trial}*