

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four U - Part 2: Punishment

by The Space Witches



Can Sarah once again work miracles?

Chapter 2

31 December 2273 - midnight

Gideon sat by his wife's bedside, holding her hand, as the clock struck midnight. He leaned forward, kissing her still cheek, and whispering, "Happy New Year."

There were times when he felt as if his whole life had been lived in this room, rather than just the last month of the old year. It seemed as if he'd spent an eternity sitting beside Deborah's bed, holding her hand, talking to her, hoping against hope that she'd wake up and respond, but fearing she might never wake again. At times like this, he felt as if his life before Galen's attack had all been a dream. This room, this bed, this unconscious woman were the only things

that were real.

Lifting Deborah's hand to his lips, Gideon kissed it gently. He held onto it as he reached out with his other hand to stroke her hair. The pale gold mass of curls was spread out across the pillow like a cloak, and to Gideon his wife looked like Sleeping Beauty. He wished he could wake her with a kiss, but it wasn't that easy. Life never was.

Squeezing her hand, he started to talk, telling her about the events of his life, about the progress on the house in England, about what Marcus and Angel had been doing, as he did every day when he came to see her.

"Marcus misses you. He keeps asking when you'll come home, and why you don't send to him any more. Every day we have a few tears, but Angel and I keep telling him it won't be long now. The problem is that to a four year old a day is a long time, and a week is an eternity. I don't know whether I should keep bringing him to see you or not. At least if he sees you, he knows you haven't left us, but he can't understand why you don't wake up. We tell him it's because the baby is still growing inside you, and he can see the bump is getting bigger, but he doesn't understand why we can't just take Mattie out and wake you up."

Gideon paused, releasing Deborah's hand for a moment and resting his hand on her belly. He whispered, "Hello, Mattie. Sarah's shown me some pictures of you, and you're growing big and strong. Soon we'll be able to meet properly." He smiled sadly and moved his hand away, picking up his wife's pale, limp fingers and squeezing them gently again, as he resumed his monologue.

"Alwyn's looking tired. Sarah tells me she doesn't understand what he's doing or how he's doing it, but somehow he's keeping you and Mattie alive. She showed me the brain scans she'd done at the same time as Mattie's pictures, and she says you're fine. Just asleep." Gideon paused, forcing himself into stillness, fearing that if he lost control he'd take Deborah's shoulders and try to shake her awake. He was getting that desperate for her to come back to him. After a few moments of strained silence he took a deep breath and went on.

"Sarah and Alwyn took Jaysen to stay with Ilas and Dureena, so they could devote all their time and energy to helping you. It was damned good of them, and I tried to tell them they should spend more time with their son, but they insisted." Gideon smiled and stroked his wife's blonde hair again. "If I didn't know how much Sarah meant to Alwyn, I'd start to worry about him and you. I'd wonder if he wanted to steal you from me."

Emotion threatened to choke Gideon again, but he pressed on. "Angel's amazing. I'm not sure how I'd cope without her. When Marcus has been screaming all day and driving me to distraction, she takes over. I think I might have murdered the little brat by now if it weren't for Angel." He paused and forced a smile to his face before asking, "Did I ever tell you that he takes after your side of the family? I'm sure I was never that annoying when I was a kid."

Gideon would have given anything to hear the deep chuckle that sentence would have provoked if Deborah had been awake. He knew she would have laughed at him, teasing him that Marcus was entirely his father's son. He missed her laugh and her teasing more than he could ever have imagined.

"Angel starts rehearsals on her new movie next week. She wanted to drop out, but it's a

damned good role for her. It could really help her career take off. So I insisted she should take the part and carry on working. Life has to go on, and just because I feel as if I've been frozen in time and space, there's no reason why Angel should put her life on hold, too. I'm not sure how Marcus and I will cope without her around, but we'll manage. Somehow. I can't let Angel give up more of her life for us. She's already lost too much because of me and that stupid Box of mine. I won't let her lose anything else. I know you'd agree with that."

Gideon swallowed a large lump as he thought about how much Angel missed her sister, but how brave she'd been while Deborah had been unconscious. She never let Gideon or Marcus see her pain, but Gideon had heard her crying at night. It had taken everything he had not to go to her room to comfort her. He knew damned well what would happen if he ever did that. Put him alone in a room with Angel, add a bed, throw in a dash of tears, and it added up to a recipe for disaster.

Pushing those thoughts aside, Gideon went on, "We all miss you. Marcus misses you, Angel misses you, and I don't have the words to tell you how much I miss you. Before I met you I never thought I could need someone this much. I do need you. God, how I need you."

Another lump threatened to choke him, and he took a deep breath to dispel the threat of tears. His voice hardened and all his old command tones came back as he went on, "So you'd better not leave us, OK? You just have to hold on for a few more weeks, then we can get Mattie out, fix the damage and wake you up. That's an order, Deborah, so you'd better make sure you do as you're told."

Gideon could easily imagine how Deborah would have responded to such an order. She would have laughed out loud, and made a very rude noise. Then she'd probably have pounced on him, pushing him onto the nearest flat surface, and challenging him to make her obey. The result would have been inevitable. A long, lazy session of lovemaking, culminating in them bringing each other to a peak of pleasure that nothing and no one could match.

The image of how Deborah would look, naked, straddling his hips, riding his erection, her breasts bouncing gently before him was enough to arouse Gideon, and he quickly pushed the image aside. He looked down at his wife's pale, still face and leaned forward to kiss her lips, as he whispered, "I love you. Come back to me soon."

Sarah Chambers stood in the open doorway of Demon's room and watched as her old Captain bent over his wife's bed and gently kissed her lips. It nearly broke Sarah's heart to see Gideon like that. His love and need for Demon were almost palpable, and Sarah knew that he and Marcus were struggling with Demon's absence.

It was too much to expect that a four year old little boy could really understand why his mother wouldn't wake up and talk to him. The doctor was also concerned that Marcus could be building up some real issues with his new little sister. It would be very easy for the toddler to blame the baby for everything, and this could increase the natural resentment that any small child had toward a new baby that was taking his parents' attention away from him. Matthew and Demon could have some rocky times ahead, even if Demon's physical recovery was complete, and that was by no means certain.

Sarah sighed softly and turned away from the doorway before Matt could see her. She knew he would only ask her questions she couldn't answer and she preferred to avoid those questions if she could. She didn't want to tell Matt again that she had no idea how Alwyn was keeping Demon alive or how much longer he could keep doing it. She was deeply concerned about the strain that doing whatever he was doing was placing on her partner.

Alwyn was spending much of his days and nights at Demon's bedside, only leaving when others came to visit the comatose woman. What the Technomage did during those hours was a mystery to Sarah but she knew it was exhausting him. She remembered all too well that Alwyn had nearly killed himself helping Dureena. Her fear was that he was doing the same to save Demon.

This time, his task had been complicated by Demon being in the hospital. It had taken a great deal of persuasion from Sarah to stop the local doctors operating on Demon. They had been convinced that it was the tall blonde's only chance of survival. Sarah had been forced to tell them that she would take personal responsibility for Demon's case, and poor Matt had signed releases until his hand ached. The hospital administrators had wanted them to take Demon out of there, but eventually Sarah's powers of persuasion and Gideon's famous name had combined to convince the top bosses that Demon should be allowed to remain, under Sarah's care. The trouble was, Sarah had no real idea of what Alwyn was doing.

As she walked down the corridor the dark doctor sighed to herself. At least Alwyn wouldn't have to keep up his efforts for much longer. Baby Mattie was nearly twenty-seven weeks old; she could now survive independently of her mother. The replacement organs they had cloned from Demon's damaged tissues were also ready for implanting. Sarah had wanted to operate to remove the baby a week earlier, but Alwyn had made her admit that the baby's chances of survival improved with every day she spent inside her mother's womb. The Technomage had insisted that the operation should be delayed as long as possible, to give Mattie the best possible chance of survival.

Arriving at the office the hospital had set aside for her, Sarah found her partner stretched out on the couch, deeply asleep. Alwyn's exhaustion was clear from his failure to wake as she entered the room. Ishtar lay curled up on the Mage's belly, and the tiny dragon opened one lazy eye as the doctor entered, appeared to wink in greeting, then returned to her snooze. Sarah couldn't help but smile. Ishtar always enjoyed a nice nap.

Kneeling beside the couch, Sarah raised her hand and gently caressed her lover's face. Alwyn's eyes opened at once, and he smiled at her, all the love and passion he felt for her evident in his expression. Sarah kissed him gently, saying, "Time to go back to your ship. We both need a proper sleep in that big bed of ours."

Alwyn opened his mouth to protest, but Sarah laid her fingers over his lips and smiled mischievously.

"Doctor's orders."

8th January 2274

Angel sat in silence, holding her sister's hand. She had run out of things to say. She had already told Demon everything that had happened during the previous twenty-four hours since her last visit, telling about her work, about the cast and crew of her new movie, about how well the rehearsals were going, about her hopes for the future of the movie and her career. Angel had spoken about Matt and Marcus, about Sarah, Alwyn, Jaysen and Ishtar, and about the latest messages from Ilas, Dureena and Max, Lily, John, Luke and all their children.

Both families were working out on the rim, both on missions that they had been unable to terminate, despite their anxiety to be together. Angel and Matt had repeatedly assured Lily, Ilas and their partners that there was nothing they could do on Earth. There was nothing anyone could do, except wait.

Having nothing left to say, Angel sat in silence, wishing that her sister would wake up and resume her life soon. The strain of living in the same house as Matt, alone except for Marcus, was telling on them both. The physical attraction between her and her brother-in-law was as strong as ever, and Angel knew that Matt's desire to comfort her was nearly as great as her desire for him. But that was one temptation they both had to resist. Neither would be able to live with themselves if they betrayed Demon in that way. That knowledge didn't make the temptation any easier to live with.

Angel had considered moving out until Demon came home, but she couldn't leave Matt to look after Marcus alone. She had to stay and give him the support he needed, emotional as well as physical. [But not sexual. He's my brother, not my lover,] Angel told herself sternly.

The little voice that sometimes nagged inside her brain snorted in derision. [Yeah, but that never stopped you indulging in a little light incest in the past, did it? Keeping it in the family, were you?]

Angel told the voice to shut up, and was grateful for the interruption when the door to the room opened. She expected to see Sarah there, coming for one of her regular check-ups on the unconscious woman, but Angel was delighted to see Alwyn instead. She had been waiting for an opportunity to speak to the Technomage alone for some time, but this was the first chance she'd had.

Alwyn smiled and greeted her, and Angel watched as he moved to the bed, pulling a large crystal from his pocket and waving it slowly above Demon's head. Angel had no idea what Alwyn was looking for, but he seemed engrossed in whatever he could see, giving Angel the opportunity to observe him closely. The Technomage looked tired and old, more like the Alwyn they had all first met than the younger man he had revealed himself to be later in their relationship. The strain of keeping Demon and Mattie alive for so long was written clearly in the lines of exhaustion on Alwyn's face. Angel could only hope that his strength would last a few more days.

Mattie was now twenty-eight weeks old, and Angel knew Sarah planned to operate on Demon, to remove the baby and replace the missing organs, when Mattie reached thirty weeks. The Technomage had to keep going for two more weeks. Angel wished she could give him some of her strength to help him.

After a long silence, Alwyn nodded to himself, put the crystal back into his pocket and turned to Angel. He looked closely at her for a moment, then said, "You look tired, Angel. Have you

been burning the candle at both ends? Working during the day and helping Matthew and Marcus at night?"

Angel laughed quietly as she replied, "And if I have, you're hardly in a position to criticize, are you? That sounds like the pot calling the kettle black. Hello, Mr. Pot!"

Alwyn chuckled, gave a deep, sweeping bow and said, "Delighted to meet you, Miss Kettle."

He turned and was about to leave when Angel called him back. "Alwyn, do you have a moment? There's something I've wanted to ask you about for a while now."

Alwyn raised an eyebrow, but nodded and pulled a chair from the side of the room to sit next to Angel, nodding at her sleeping sister. "Is it something about Demon?"

Angel shook her head. "No, it's something about me. Something happened on the day when..." she swallowed hastily, forcing the next words out of a suddenly tightened throat, "the day Galen attacked Demon. Something I don't understand. I thought you might be able to help me."

Alwyn narrowed his eyes and looked carefully at Angel before nodding for her to continue. Taking a deep breath, Angel explained.

"When I arrived outside the house, I heard Demon scream in my head, and I knew I had to get to her. I remember sitting in the runabout, then I remember being inside the kitchen. I don't remember anything in between."

Angel looked up at Alwyn, but his face had gone blank. He made no comment, just gesturing for her to continue. Swallowing again, Angel asked, "When you arrived at the house, was the front door open?"

Alwyn shook his head but remained silent. Angel asked her next question. "Was the door at least unlocked?" Alwyn shook his head again.

Angel sighed, fretting at her inability to explain what had happened. "Then how did I get into the kitchen? I don't remember unlocking the door, and I certainly didn't fasten it again behind me, but I know when I went to let the paramedics in, the door was still locked. I know you Technomages can get through doors without opening them, but how did I do it? What happened, Alwyn? What did I do?"

Alwyn reached out and patted Angel's hand, trying to calm the now obviously frightened woman. "You accessed a part of your power you have only used before when merged with your sisters. The power has always been there, a necessary adjunct to your telekinesis, but you've never previously used it as an individual. You teleported, Angel."

Angel gasped, even though she had suspected the truth for a while. Suspecting it and having it confirmed were two very different things. One thing Alwyn had said puzzled her. "Why do you say I've used this power when merged with my sisters? I don't remember doing that."

Leaning forward, Alwyn grasped Angel's hand and squeezed it gently. "I suspect you don't remember much of what happened when you fully merged with your sisters. That was for your protection. Only Demon really remembered the things that happened during the merge, as she was the controller and director. She remembered the pain and the deaths. It was those

memories that made her lead you in rebellion against the Vorlons, refusing to do their will, refusing to be the weapon they had designed you to be."

The Mage sighed deeply, turning to look at Demon and reaching out to draw his finger along her pale cheek. "She told me about those memories, although she never shared them with anyone else, not even her husband. She didn't want to burden him or her sisters with the pain and guilt she felt. But she thought it was important that someone else should know what you were designed to be, and how the merge worked. She honored me with her trust."

Angel was both surprised and appalled. Why had Demon never confided in her sisters? Why hadn't she trusted them? [Because she was trying to protect you, stupid. That's what Demon always did. She always tried to shelter and protect us from the worst the Vorlon could do.]

After a few moments of silence, during which Angel pushed away the memories of the time she and her sisters had spent being trained by the Vorlon, and the pain the Vorlon had caused them, she asked quietly, "So what is this power I was able to use in the merge, but not alone. Until now. And how do I use it again?"

Alwyn shook his head gravely. "It's the power of teleportation. When in the merge, you used it to transport weapons into the vulnerable points of your enemies' ships. You used it to move your own ship out of danger when needed. Lily's prescience would warn you of an attack, and you would respond by teleporting yourself, your sisters, and your ship to a safer part of space. From there, you would use your telekinesis to strike out at your enemies again. You have a dangerous power, Angel. One that you would be best not to use again."

Angel shook her head in frustration. "I don't understand. Why is it so dangerous? Why should moving myself or something else from one place to another in a blink be dangerous?" She felt herself growing annoyed with the Mage. "It sounds like fun, and I want to be able to control it."

The Mage leaned forward and the intensity of his glare took Angel aback for a moment. "This power is dangerous because to activate it you have to draw on your deepest core of strength. That core is more powerful than you can ever know, Angel. You and your sisters have always assumed that Demon is the power behind the merge. You've thought more recently that it was the Vorlon inside her that gave you the strength you needed. You were wrong."

Alwyn paused long enough for Angel to wonder what he was going to say next. She had a horrible suspicion she knew, a suspicion confirmed when he went on, "It's you, Angel. You are the power in the merge. But that power is buried deep inside you, and it is driven from a dark place. You must not go there. You must not draw on that power, or the darkness that holds the power may overwhelm you. Don't go there, Angel. Leave it alone."

Angel was frightened by the Technomage's intensity and she nodded frantically. She had no desire to open herself up to darkness. Her time with Lucas had taught her what true evil looked like, and she never wanted to see it again. If she had anything like that buried deep inside her--although she wasn't entirely convinced Alwyn was correct--it could stay well and truly buried. She was going to have to do a lot of thinking about what the Mage had told her, but now was not the time.

"Thanks for explaining. I promise I won't use it. I won't start blinking in and out of places just

for fun. I'll leave it alone."

The little voice inside Angel's head said, [Ah, but will you? I know you, Angel-girl. This is like an itchy scab. You'll just have to pick at it, won't you?]

Angel told the voice to shut up, promising herself that just for once she'd follow someone else's advice. This particular aspect of her power was best forgotten.

20th January 2274 - morning

"What sort of cereal do you want today, Marcus? There's not much choice, I'm afraid. We need to go shopping again." The groan from behind Gideon's back, as he looked into the nearly empty kitchen cabinet, told him his son's enthusiasm for that chore was nearly as great as his own. Gideon grinned, grabbed a box of Cheerios, and turned to look at Marcus. "OK, how about we send in an order when we've finished breakfast, then hit the beach? Does that sound like more fun?"

Marcus' wide grin and frantic nodding indicated his approval of the revised plan. Given a choice between playing on the beach and shopping for groceries, Gideon found himself in total agreement. He poured the cereal into a bowl and placed it in front of his son, who was sitting, waiting patiently for his breakfast, at the kitchen table. Gideon was just adding milk, having previously found things got pretty messy if he let Marcus do that for himself, when the comm. system sounded.

Leaving his son to attack his breakfast as if he hadn't been fed in weeks, Gideon called to the machine. "Accept call." He raised his coffee mug to his lips and was about to take a sip when the wall screen lit up, and was filled with Sarah Chambers' somber features.

Before Gideon could greet her, the doctor said, "Get down here, Matt. Alwyn just collapsed. We're going to start operating on Demon in about five minutes."

Gideon froze, the screen going blank before he could even ask if the Technomage was OK, never mind any of the other questions that raced through his head. A little whimper from the table next to him drew the retired Captain's attention to his son. Marcus was looking up at him, his golden brown eyes large and liquid with the threat of tears.

"Is Mummy going to die?" The little boy's chin quivered and a tear rolled down his cheek as Gideon swept him into his arms and hugged him tightly.

"No. She's going to be fine, and so is Mattie. Now put on your shoes, then we'll go down to the hospital and be there waiting when your little sister is born and Mommy wakes up. OK?" Gideon kept his voice steady and cheerful, suppressing all the panic he felt inside, so his son wouldn't pick up on it.

Marcus swallowed quickly and nodded, apparently cheered by his father's confident tones. The boy slipped from his chair and ran from the room, giving Gideon a moment to place a call to Angel. Her answering service took the call, as Gideon had expected. His sister-in-law was in the middle of rehearsals for her new movie, and would pick up the message when she took her next break.

"Angel, it's time. Get yourself down to the hospital as soon as you can. I'll be there waiting."

Gideon decided that Angel didn't need to know about Alwyn's collapse. He told himself that if Deborah was in danger, Sarah would have said something. [They're going to be OK, they *have* to be OK.]

It was a couple of days earlier than they had planned, but Mattie was now nearly thirty weeks old. Old enough to survive independently. The baby would be fine, Gideon was sure of that. [But will Deborah be OK? Can she survive the operations she now has to go through? Is she going to be strong enough after all this time?] Gideon pushed all those doubts away as his son rushed back into the room, half tripping over unfastened shoes, grasping Half-Ted firmly in one hand.

Stooping quickly to tie his son's shoes, Gideon then lifted Marcus with one arm, grabbed a jacket with his free hand and left the house at a run.

As Gideon rushed through the doors of the hospital, he carried Marcus in his arms, unwilling to reduce his speed to accommodate the child's slower pace. He found Sarah Chambers standing in the lobby waiting for them.

Sarah looked tired and worried, still dressed in scrubs, but with her head bare of the cap she would have worn in surgery. She did her best to smile as father and son approached her, and before Gideon could open his mouth, she said, "We finished the c-section a few minutes ago. Mattie's doing fine. She's in an incubator, but you can see her now."

Gideon's heart did a somersault of relief, but he had to ask, "And Deborah? How's she doing?"

Sarah had turned and started to lead them from the lobby, but she paused and turned back at Gideon's question. She glanced at Marcus, who was watching her intently, and Gideon silently cursed himself for asking the question in front of his son. Sarah would have no choice but to tell the truth. Marcus would know instantly if she lied.

The doctor took a deep breath and said quietly, "She's still in the Operating suite, and it's still too early to tell. It will be hours yet before we know if the transplants have been successful, but she has the best team working for her that we could assemble. She couldn't be in better hands."

Turning again, Sarah led the way down a corridor, with Gideon still carrying his son as he followed her, mulling over what she had just said, refusing to allow himself to feel the fear her words had aroused. If he was afraid, Marcus would be frightened, too.

The little boy was silent, sucking on the remaining shreds of Half-Ted's ear. Gideon wondered what his son was thinking, a question answered a few seconds later when the little boy leaned in to whisper softly into his father's ear, "Auntie Sarah is scared."

Gideon swore under his breath. He could suppress his own fears, but there was nothing he could do about other people. He had a sudden inspiration, thanking the fates that his son was an empath, not a telepath, and whispered back, "She's worried about Grandpa Alwyn. He's not feeling too good."

Marcus' face cleared and he gave his father a shaky smile of relief. "She's not scared about Mummy then?"

Gideon smiled back, and hugged his son closely, his mind racing to find a suitable response. "Auntie Sarah worries about us all. It's because she loves us." Marcus seemed to accept the reply, even though it avoided his question rather than answering it.

The retired Captain lengthened his pace, and drew level with Sarah, asking, "Is Alwyn OK? You said he'd collapsed."

Sarah's face was unreadable, but a little whimper of distress from Marcus gave Gideon a good idea of what she was feeling. After a few seconds, she said quietly, "He's recovering, but he's still very weak. Crazy old man."

Gideon would have liked to know more, but he knew the subject was still too raw for Sarah to speak about easily, so he acknowledged her answer with an abrupt nod, and a terse, "Good."

Rounding a corner, Sarah pushed through a set of double doors and into a sunny and brightly painted room. Complex equipment whose function Gideon could only guess at lined the walls, but in the middle of the room a number of small, clear Perspex covered boxes sat on top of mobile gurneys. Sarah led Gideon and Marcus to one of these, in which a tiny, very red looking baby lay.

Gideon felt his throat close and his eyes fill as he looked at his daughter for the first time. She had tiny white socks covering her hands and feet, a little white bonnet on her head, covering whatever hair she might have had, and a tiny diaper around her middle. She looked so small, so much smaller than Marcus had looked when he was born. Gideon had to remind himself that although Marcus had been born a month prematurely, male babies in his family always grew fast in the early weeks of pregnancy, slowing down later. Females didn't share that trait, and Mattie was ten weeks premature, so of course she'd be tiny.

"Do you want to hold her for a moment?" Sarah's voice reminded him that he wasn't alone with his little girl, and Gideon looked up to see the doctor smiling at him.

"Can I? Isn't she hooked up to...stuff?" Gideon failed to find a more specific word, but Sarah smiled, knowing what he'd meant.

"Not at the moment. The air in the incubator is enriched with oxygen, and we may have to feed her through a tube for a while, but we'll see if she can take food orally before we do that. She may be tiny, but she's a tough little thing. A true Gideon."

Gideon wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry, then decided that he'd be better doing neither. He lowered Marcus to the floor, then they both watched, entranced, as Sarah pushed back the top of the incubator, carefully wrapped Mattie in a soft blanket, and lifted her from her bed.

"You'd better sit down, Matt. You look like you might fall down, and I don't want you dropping the baby. Try remembering to breathe occasionally. It helps." Sarah's tone was teasing and for the first time that day, her smile looked genuine.

Gideon sat abruptly in the chair that stood by the side of the incubator. He held out his arms, and Sarah passed him the tiny bundle that was his daughter. He cradled her carefully,

remembering everything Alwyn had taught him when Marcus was born, remembering to support her head and neck.

He looked down into his daughter's sleeping face and smiled. Then he looked up to see Marcus standing on tiptoe, trying to see around the edge of the blanket, straining to get a glimpse of his sister's face. Gideon grinned and pulled back the cover a little, allowing Marcus a better view.

"Marcus, this is your little sister. Say hello to Mattie." The words came out half-strangled, forced past a lump in his throat that he was unable to clear.

Marcus looked down at his little sister, who at that moment yawned widely, and opened her eyes. Gideon knew she couldn't focus yet, but somehow it seemed that her big, dark eyes looked from him to Marcus and back, before she gave a tiny mewl, closed her eyes and went back to sleep. Mattie snored very softly as she slept, and Gideon swallowed the lump that had threatened to choke him, as he thought, [She takes after her mother.]

Marcus gave a tiny chuckle and said, "She likes being held. She feels warm and safe."

Gideon was astonished. Could his son really pick up Mattie's feelings when she was still so young? Apparently so. Marcus went on softly, "She's very pretty, isn't she, Daddy? Even if she is a bit red."

The retired Captain looked proudly from his son back to his daughter, and ran the back of his finger very gently along her cheek. "She's the prettiest girl in the world. Just don't tell your Mommy I said that."

20th January 2274 - Afternoon

Angel rushed through the doors of the waiting room, where Gideon was sitting on the sofa, watching Marcus as he played with some of the toys the hospital kept there. Gideon looked up as she burst through the doors, and he stood, moving quickly toward her as she yelled, "What's happening? Is Demon all right?"

Gideon held his hands up, trying to calm Angel as he said, "Everything's fine. Mattie's been born and she's doing OK, but they're still operating on Deborah. It'll be a while before we find out how successful it's been." A quick glance at his son reassured the retired Captain that Marcus was still playing with the toys, apparently unaffected by his Aunt's distress. Angel was the one person whose emotions Marcus couldn't sense.

Before Gideon could raise his arm to block the blow, Angel punched a fist into his shoulder and started to cry as she shouted, "You stupid man! Why didn't you tell me that? I've been frightened half to death all the time I was driving here, and you don't have your commlink turned on, and I couldn't get through to you, and...and..."

Angel's words disintegrated into sobs as Gideon finally managed to catch her flailing arms, holding her wrists tightly to prevent any more blows landing. He told himself he was lucky she was too upset to use her telekinesis, or the punches would have been much more painful. He pulled her tightly against his chest, releasing her wrists and putting his arms around her as

she lowered her head to his shoulder and sobbed.

"I'm sorry, it was stupid of me. Everything's all right, it's all going to be fine." Gideon spoke soothing words and stroked Angel's hair as she leaned against him and cried. He kissed the top of her head gently, patting her back, and trying to calm her in the same way as he did with Marcus, when his son got upset.

After a few moments, Angel's tears abated, and she sniffed loudly. Gideon smiled and reached into his pocket for a handkerchief. Why was it that the women in his life never carried handkerchiefs with them? He always seemed to be handing them over, and of course, he never saw them again. As far as he knew, he was the only man on Earth who actually welcomed handkerchiefs as birthday or Christmas gifts.

Pushing those thoughts aside, Gideon concentrated on Angel, telling her quietly how Alwyn had collapsed, making the doctors perform the c-section on Deborah earlier than they'd planned. He forced himself to stay calm as he described the situation, not allowing any of his fears about the operation Deborah was now undergoing to show in his voice or manner. He couldn't afford to have either Angel or Marcus become aware of his apprehension.

After blowing her nose loudly and thoroughly--[and in a very unladylike fashion,] thought Gideon, with some amusement--Angel asked, "Is Alwyn all right? Where's Sarah? Is she in surgery with Demon?"

Gideon shook his head and led her to the sofa. Marcus looked up from his game, and smiled at his aunt, immediately coming over to them, pulling on her skirt, wanting to sit on Angel's knee. His son's actions made Gideon aware for the first time that Angel was still in costume and make-up. She must have dashed straight from the set, not even stopping to change. He felt a moment of guilt, [Idiot! You should have left her another message, or at least left your comm. link turned on so she could call!] but again he pushed the thought aside as irrelevant.

When Angel settled back in the sofa, with Marcus snuggled on her lap, Gideon explained what had happened. "Sarah's with Alwyn now. She's promised to let us know as soon as we can see him. From what she's said, the main problem is exhaustion. Whatever he was doing to keep Deborah and Mattie alive has drained him completely."

Angel nodded, hugging Marcus closely, seeming to take comfort from the little boy's warm body. Gideon hurriedly dismissed a moment of jealousy, thinking how much he would have enjoyed a snuggle from Angel himself.

After a moment's silence, Angel asked, "And Mattie's OK? When can we see her?"

Gideon smiled and explained that he and Marcus had already seen the baby, but now the nurses were feeding her. "They tried her with a tiny bottle, but her sucking reflex hasn't kicked in yet, so they have to put a tube down her nose and feed her through that." The thought of his daughter having to endure such treatment made Gideon want to weep, but he knew it was for her own good. She had to take nourishment somehow. He swallowed rapidly and tried to smile as he said, "The nurses decided I looked like the squeamish type, so they sent me out while they're getting the tube in. They'll come and get us when she's finished feeding."

Angel smiled sadly, and reached out to touch Gideon's arm gently, a touch that raised the hairs

on his arms and on the back of his neck. Even with the heavy make-up she was wearing, Angel was still one of the most desirable women Gideon had ever known, and his attraction to her was undiminished. His desire to take her back into his arms and hold her again was nearly overwhelming him, when he was saved from himself by Sarah appearing in the doorway.

Angel looked up at Sarah, and the doctor's smile said everything she needed to know. Alwyn must be all right, or Sarah wouldn't be smiling like that. The raven haired witch started to slide Marcus off her knee so she could stand, but Matt leaned over her and took his son from her. As he leaned forward, Angel caught a whiff of his unique scent, that cinnamon, spicy smell that aroused her every time she was near him.

Schooling her features, Angel refused to allow her memory to drag her back to those all-too-short moments when Matt had held her in his arms, comforting her, stroking her hair, even kissing her forehead. It would have been so easy to lift her head, to meet his lips with her own, to... [Stop it! How can you think that? Demon could be dying in surgery and you're lusting after her husband!]

Before Angel's self-disgust could overwhelm her, she stood abruptly and moved away from the cause of her problems. If she couldn't see Matt, or smell his musk, she might be able to remember he was her brother-in-law, nothing more. The sound of his voice sent a shiver down Angel's spine and she knew it was hopeless. She would never stop feeling that way about him. Not until she found a man of her own.

The sense of Matt's words, as opposed to the sound of his voice, finally penetrated Angel's consciousness.

"...fit to have visitors?"

Sarah smiled. "Yes, he's awake now," Angel realized they were talking about Alwyn, "and I've told him you want to see him. Come with me."

Sarah turned and led them from the room, with Matt carrying Marcus, and Angel following closely behind, trying to look at anything other than Matt's butt, and failing miserably.

Alwyn was sitting upright in bed, propped against the pillows when Gideon carried his son into the room. Marcus immediately beamed and said loudly, "Grandpa Alwyn! Wanna go to Grandpa Alwyn!" He struggled in Gideon's arms, while his father tried to restrain him, telling him that his 'grandpa' was feeling a little under the weather, and wasn't up to playing games with Marcus.

The little boy pouted and Alwyn smiled weakly, saying, "Let him sit here on the bed next to me. There's someone here who wants to say 'hello' to him."

Marcus let out a squeal of delight as Ishtar poked her head above the bedcovers. Gideon laughed. The dragon must have been hiding, waiting to be sure that Alwyn's visitors were people she knew.

While Marcus was distracted with the small, golden dragon, Gideon looked at her master closely. Alwyn looked old and tired. Whatever he had done to save Deborah had cost him dearly. Gideon could only think of two words to say; words that seemed completely inadequate to express his appreciation to the Mage.

"Thank you."

Alwyn nodded and smiled, appearing to understand that the depth of Gideon's gratitude could find no other expression. "It was the least I could do. A Technomage was responsible for the injuries; it was only justice that a Technomage should help repair them." Alwyn's expression became mischievous as he went on, "And apart from my innate sense of justice, I do have rather a soft spot for that leggy blonde wife of yours, Matthew. Just think yourself lucky that I found a tall woman of my own, or I may have taken Demon away from you."

He reached out his hand and smiled softly at Sarah, who snorted with derision, saying, "Nonsense. You know very well I gave you no choice in the matter. As soon as I saw the size of your staff, I kicked your feet out from under you, and I've never let you stand upright again since."

Alwyn chuckled fondly at his partner and raised her hand to his lips, kissing it gently, then saying to Gideon and Angel, "See? She only wants me for my staff."

The atmosphere in the room became relaxed, and Gideon found himself, for the first time in months, finally able to believe that perhaps everything was going to be all right. Perhaps there could be a happy ending after all. He listened, smiling, to the banter back and forth between Sarah and Alwyn, watching as his son played with Ishtar, tickling her tummy and stroking her chin.

Angel's voice intruded softly, asking the question Gideon had been trying to avoid, "Were you able to do enough, Alwyn? Is Demon going to be all right?"

The smiles faded from everyone's faces as they were brought back to reality. Alwyn looked sadly at the raven-haired beauty, and said softly, "I hope so, Angel. We should know in a few hours. For now, all we can do is wait."

Gideon nodded, telling himself that he'd waited this long, another couple of hours wouldn't kill him. [But what if she's not there at the end of all this time? What if we've lost her?] For a moment, Gideon felt a shaft of pain thrust straight through his heart. [No. That's not going to happen. I won't even think about it.]

He swallowed quickly, realizing that the room had gone still and silent in the aftermath of Alwyn's reply. Then Marcus let out a little whimper of distress, and Gideon rushed forward, pulling his son into his arms again, and forcing himself to think only positive and happy thoughts.

"It's OK, Marcus. Everything is going to be OK."

Maybe if he said it often enough, he might eventually come to believe it.

Maybe.

20th January 2274 - Late evening

Gideon looked up in hope as the door to the waiting room opened. He tried not to let his disappointment show as Angel walked in, holding Marcus by the hand. The little boy rushed across the room and climbed onto his father's knee, telling him exactly what he had eaten in the hospital restaurant.

Marcus finished with an excited, "And they had bright green ice cream! You should try some, Daddy. It was *very* good."

Gideon smiled at his son and ruffled his hair fondly. The retired Captain had refused to join Angel and Marcus for the meal, knowing that his stomach would reject anything he tried to eat. He was too wound up, too stressed and too anxious to digest anything. Looking over at Angel, he wondered whether she had managed to eat, a question answered when Marcus went on, "I asked Auntie Angel to try some, but she said she wasn't hungry."

Looking over at his sister-in-law, Gideon said softly, "You should eat."

Angel smiled sadly, replying equally softly, "So should you."

The two adults listened as Marcus chattered on, both relieved at the little boy's ability to fill the silence that could otherwise have been uncomfortable. When Marcus finally ran out of things to say about his dinner, he looked up at his father and asked, "When can we see Mummy? We always go to see her when we come here. I want to see Mummy."

Marcus' lip began to tremble and Gideon knew they were in for another bout of tears. He was wondering how he could head it off, when he was saved by the door opening quietly. Sarah Chambers slipped into the room, smiling broadly. Gideon's heart did a double back-flip. If Sarah was smiling...

He rose quickly, still holding Marcus, aware that Angel had leaped to her feet and was standing, clutching his arm tightly. Gideon found he couldn't speak, couldn't breathe, could do nothing but stare at Sarah, his eyes pleading for good news.

"She's alive."

Sarah's words hit Gideon like a blow. He felt his knees weakening beneath him, and he sat quickly, knowing that he might collapse if he didn't. He opened his mouth to ask questions, but no sound emerged. He knew he must look like a fish out of water, opening and closing his mouth, gasping for breath, unable to speak. Sarah saved him from the necessity.

"The operations went well. All the damaged organs have been replaced, and the grafts seem to be taking nicely. They've got her off life-support and she's breathing on her own now. A brain scan shows no sign of any damage, so we're hopeful that she'll come round soon. Matt, it looks like Demon is going to make a complete recovery, but it's going to take time. It could be weeks or months before she's totally back on her feet."

Sarah's last words were a blur that Gideon didn't really take in. All he could hear was, "...*Demon is going to make a complete recovery...*" She was coming back to him. Deborah was

coming back.

Finally finding the strength to stand again, Gideon gasped out the question, "When can we see her?"

He was only half-aware of Marcus, who he still hugged in his arms. The little boy was watching Sarah closely, but whatever he was sensing from the tall woman was obviously not upsetting him, as he was quiet, snuggled into his father's shoulder. Angel was sobbing quietly, her head buried in her hands as she sat on the sofa. Gideon moved across to her and stroked her hair with his free hand, while Sarah smiled and said, "You can come and see her now. She's still asleep, and she will be for a few hours yet, but you can see her, at least."

The tall doctor turned and led the way from the waiting room, Gideon and Angel following hard on her heels.

20th January 2274 - Midnight

Gideon sat at his wife's bedside, holding her hand tightly, willing her to wake up soon. He'd been sitting there for hours, hoping Deborah would wake, hoping she would talk to him, hoping she would still be the same person he'd known and loved before the attack. One fear he'd never shared with anyone was that Deborah would be changed in some way by what she'd endured. Despite Sarah's assurances that the scans showed no brain damage, Gideon knew that subtle changes in brain chemistry and prolonged comas could affect the sufferer's personality. What if the person who woke up wasn't the same? Could he still love a different Deborah?

Reaching out to touch his wife's hair, Gideon knew it wasn't just Deborah's physical beauty he loved. That may have been what had created the initial, very physical, attraction between them, but the woman he loved was much more than that. It was her humor, her intelligence, her flaws, her stubbornness, her vulnerabilities--[and yes, even her snoring,] he thought sadly to himself--that he loved. Would she still have all of that when she awoke? Would her memory have suffered in any way? Would she remember him? Would she still love him?

All the fears that Gideon had buried deep beneath the surface of his mind for the past months now surged up, nearly overwhelming him. He dropped his head to rest on Deborah's hand where he held in his, and he fought back tears. After a few moments spent gathering himself, he sat upright again, and lifted his hand to stroke his wife's pale cheek, saying softly, "Come back to me, Deborah. Please wake up."

She still didn't stir and Gideon sighed. He'd persuaded Angel to go home a couple of hours earlier, begging her to take Marcus and put him to bed. The child was exhausted, and had become more and more fractious, as the hours had passed and his mother still slept. Angel had left reluctantly, making Gideon promise to call, no matter what time it was, as soon as Deborah woke.

After a few more moments spent watching his wife in silence, listening to her deep, steady breathing, Gideon felt his eyes drooping. He laid his head on Deborah's hand again, thinking, [I'll just close my eyes for a minute, then...] He was asleep before he could complete the

thought.

The sensation of a hand gently stroking his hair brought Gideon slowly back to consciousness. He felt as if he was struggling to the surface of his dreams, fighting waves of sleep and the after-images of nightmares he could no longer remember. Forcing his eyes open, he lifted his head and shook it, trying to remember where he was.

A croaking sound brought memories flooding back to him. He looked up to see Deborah smiling at him in puzzlement. Her eyes were only half-open and he could see she was only half-awake, but the look of love on her face was unmistakable. This was his wife, his Deborah, his love. Quickly reaching for the cup of water that sat ready by the bed, he carefully held the straw to her mouth and helped her drink a little.

After swallowing a few times, Deborah tried to speak again, and although her voice was slurred and croaky. Gideon could just make out her words.

"What are you doing out there? Why aren't you in here with me?"

Gideon let out a wordless cry and leaned forward to throw his arms around her, trying to not hug too hard, knowing that she would still be sore from surgery. After a few moments spent silently weeping into his wife's hair, he finally pulled back and grinned down at his wife, sniffing as he said, "You're hopeless, you know that? You spend weeks in a coma, have hours of complex surgery, and all you can think of is how to get me into your bed." Deborah still looked confused and barely awake, so Gideon leaned forward again and kissed her gently on the lips. "I'll explain everything later. For now, all that matters is that you're back, you're you, and I love you."

He straightened and looked down at Deborah as she lay in bed, her hair spread around her, and she smiled gently, her eyes closing again as she whispered, "Tell me later. For now, just climb up here next to me and hold me."

Gideon pushed her gently across the bed, making just enough room for him to lie next to her. He climbed onto the bed, gently lifting her so he could place his arm around her shoulders, her head nestling against him. With a little sigh of contentment, Deborah slid back into sleep. With a much deeper sigh, Gideon relaxed for the first time in months, and for the first time since the attack, he dropped into a deep, dreamless sleep.

31st March 2274

Demon sat on the deck, overlooking the beach and the sea, feeding her daughter with a bottle. She looked down at Mattie, and tried to work out exactly what her feelings were toward the baby. This was *her* baby, her child, the child she had carried inside her for months, but somehow it didn't feel that way.

Holding the bottle to the baby's mouth, Demon thought back on the bond that she had started to develop with her daughter, before the attack. She had just begun to sense Mattie's feelings, just begun to bond with her daughter, when it had all been ripped away. As far as Demon was

concerned, one day she had been carrying her baby inside her, the next, she was gone. They had then placed this child, this stranger, in her arms, and told her it was Mattie. But it didn't feel like her baby. There was no bond, no feeling, no love for this tiny visitor.

Demon felt as if her child had been stolen from her, taken away while she slept. She hadn't dared tell anyone how she felt, because she was sure that they'd think her a bad mother. How could she not love her child? How could she explain that part of her was grieving for the child she had lost, the baby who had been taken from her? It was all so confusing, especially when combined with the physical and psychological damage done in Galen's attack.

In the two months since she had woken, Demon had gradually regained her physical strength, slowly overcoming the pain of her healing wounds. Her body was now almost completely recovered, and the tall blonde awaited the final check-up that Sarah Chambers planned to carry out later in the day with some trepidation. Sarah's medical orders were the only thing preventing Demon and Matthew making love again.

They had shared a bed every night since Demon had returned from the hospital, but they had not made love, as Sarah had told them both that Demon was still too fragile, physically. While sleeping in her husband's arms every night meant a lot to Demon, she wanted more. She wanted to feel him inside her again, to share the physical, emotional and spiritual closeness that making love gave them. Her only concern was whether she would still be able to sense Matthew's feelings and send her own. She couldn't help but remember Matthew's words early on the day she had lost her baby. He had missed Demon sending her orgasms, and now she had no idea if she would be able to do that any more. What if she couldn't?

Demon's mental recuperation from the attack had been much slower than her physical healing. She was still unable to sense the feelings of people around her, and could no longer send her feelings to others. She could link to Marcus and Angel, but only when they were in the house with her. Over any greater distance, Demon was unable to send to her sister and son. Even Matthew's feelings were mostly hidden from her. When he touched her, she could just make out his emotions, as long as he wasn't trying to block. What worried Demon most was that Matthew *did* block his feelings much of the time and she didn't know why.

She was worried that he sensed her ambivalence toward Mattie, and that he was disappointed in his wife's lack of response to her baby. It had been obvious from the first that Matthew adored his baby daughter. From the day Mattie had been released from hospital he had cared for her, doing all the things that Demon had been unable to do at that time, handicapped as she was by her physical infirmity. Any bond that might be lacking between mother and child seemed more than made up for by the attachment between Matthew and his daughter.

Demon tried not to be jealous, knowing she shared something with Marcus that Matthew would never have. It was only fair that he should have the opportunity to share something special with his daughter, as Demon shared a special connection with their son. [It's only fair. I know it is. If I keep telling myself that often enough, maybe I'll be able to believe it someday.]

Thinking of fairness made Demon dwell on the injustice of what had been done to her. A wave of anger swept through her as she thought about her attacker. She hid her hatred of Galen behind the same mask she used to hide her other feelings, but it burned inside her. [How could he do this to us? To me? I never liked him, but I never knowingly hurt him. Why did he hate me so much?]

The same questions had gone around and around in Demon's head ever since she had been told what had happened. She knew the answers, but somehow they never seemed sufficient. She knew the Technomage had tried to kill her because of something she couldn't control, something she herself hated: the Vorlon inside her. Didn't Galen know that she would be the first to drive out the awful thing if she could? How could he have tried to kill her and her baby for such a thing? How could he have taken Demon's child from her, and denied her the possibility of ever having another?

The memory of when Sarah and Matthew had told Demon she could never have another child still hurt whenever she thought of it. Matthew had been so kind, so supportive, so positive about it all, but it was impossible for him to understand how the news made Demon feel. Although she had never had strong maternal feelings, and had never really understood the need some women had to bear children, when she discovered that she was no longer able to have a child of her own, it had somehow made Demon feel less of a woman.

Sarah had told Demon over and over that if she wanted to, she could still carry a baby to term. Just not her baby. It would have to be another woman's baby, created from another woman's ovum. To Demon that meant it wasn't her child. She could never give her husband another child.

Demon couldn't help but question if this would affect the way she and Matthew made love, and a part of her wondered whether deep down that was why she'd willingly gone along with Sarah's restrictions on their love making. Perhaps Demon didn't want to find out. What if it wasn't the same? What if her inability to send, and her consciousness of having lost an essential part of her femininity, made her frigid?

Demon had never told her husband about her first lover, David; a man who had seduced Angel when she was only seventeen years old, and who had then blamed Demon, telling her that if she hadn't been so frigid, he wouldn't have been tempted by her beautiful younger sister. Before she'd met Matthew, David had been Demon's only sexual partner, and she'd lived in fear that he'd been right about her. Matthew had allayed those fears, and Demon had put them behind her, but they now came back to haunt her restless dreams.

The tall blonde fought back tears as she looked down at the child who was now sleeping in her arms, the bottle abandoned. It reminded her of another thing Galen had taken from her. The ability to breastfeed her child. At that moment, Demon was glad she no longer projected her feelings. If she did, it would be impossible for her to hide just how unhappy she was about what had happened to her and to her daughter. As it was, she could hide behind the cool mask of impassivity she always wore to conceal her feelings. Deep down she knew that Angel and Matthew weren't really fooled, but at least she didn't have to push her unhappiness in their faces.

Thinking of Angel made Demon think of her other two sisters, and for the first time that morning, she smiled. Ilas and Lily had called daily since Demon had been released from hospital, and both had told her how much they wanted to be with her. Unfortunately, both were out on different parts of the Rim, on missions that just couldn't be terminated. Demon smiled again as she remembered Lily describing the temper tantrum she had thrown when John had told the fiery little redhead that she couldn't go back to Earth to be with her sister. Demon decided that she wouldn't have wanted to be in John's shoes at that moment. But Ilas and Lily had made up for their absence with the frequency of their messages and the emotion conveyed in them.

If she was honest with herself, Demon was glad that Ilas and Lily had been unable to get to Earth. If they had come they would have brought their partners and children with them, and that would have been more noise, stress and activity than the tall blonde could easily bear. It would also have put Max and Matthew in close proximity, which would most likely have led to arguments and disagreements. That and the effort of hiding her unhappiness from all her sisters would have strained Demon to breaking point.

Hearing footsteps on the deck behind her, Demon forced a smile to her face and looked up at her husband as he appeared at her side. He looked fondly down at his daughter and said quietly, "She finished the whole bottle then? Her appetite is definitely improving. It's good to see her taking the bottle so well now." His words sent a stab of pain through Demon's chest. Her daughter shouldn't have to be fed with a bottle. She should have been breastfed, as Marcus had been.

Leaning forward, Matthew gently took the sleeping child from her mother, placing his daughter carefully against his shoulder. "I'll just put her in her crib. Do you need anything?"

Demon smiled and shook her head, not trusting herself to speak, as her voice might shake and give her away. Matthew leaned forward again and gently kissed her forehead, then turned and took the baby back indoors.

Biting her lip, Demon tried to fight back her tears as he left her alone. She was determined that he wouldn't see her cry, wouldn't have to deal with her pain as well as his anxiety for the wellbeing of his wife and daughter. Matthew had enough to deal with; he didn't need a wife who was an emotional as well as a physical burden.

Demon was determined to fight her way out of the depression and despondency that she felt, and she thought she knew how she could do it. She just had to persuade Matthew that it was a good idea.

Gideon stood in the doorway to the deck, looking at his wife as she sat with her legs stretched out in front of her on the beach chair, a warm shawl wrapped around her shoulders against the cool, spring breeze. The deck seemed to be the only place where Deborah relaxed and found some peace these days. Since her return from the hospital, she had been wound up tight, nervous when inside the house, but trying to conceal her feelings, trying to hide behind that god-awful impassive stare. She wasn't sending any more, but that didn't prevent Gideon knowing how unhappy she was. He just wasn't sure why.

He'd asked her again and again, but every time, Deborah had reassured him that she was fine, she just felt a little weak and tired. Well, after what she'd been through, that was understandable, but the excuse was wearing thin. Taking a deep breath, Gideon decided the time had come to end the charade.

He walked out onto the deck, and dropped to sit on the chair by Deborah's side. She looked up, startled by his sudden appearance, and for a moment, Gideon saw the fear in her eyes. That and the tracks of tears down her face made him lean forward quickly and pull her into his arms. He held her tightly as she broke down and sobbed into his shoulder, at last letting him share some of her pain. But Gideon couldn't help noticing that he still didn't feel what she was

feeling. Deborah still couldn't or wouldn't send.

When the storm of tears finally subsided, Gideon wiped his wife's face with his handkerchief, then gave it to her so she could blow her nose. Her eyes were red, her nose glowed pink, and her face was puffy, but she was still beautiful to him. He reached up and gently ran his thumb along her cheekbone, saying, "Are you ready to talk about it?"

Deborah gave a tiny nod, then whispered, "I didn't hear you coming. I thought it was..." Her voice ran down, and Gideon guessed why.

"Galen? You thought he'd come back?"

Deborah gave another nod and swallowed hard. Gideon took her hand and squeezed it tightly. "He's not coming back, Deborah. You're safe now. Alwyn has set up some of his devices around the house, and Galen can't get back in here without us knowing. If he ever tries to harm you again, Alwyn and I will kill him, and Angel will help. You have to believe that. You're safe."

Gideon watched as his wife sniffed and blew her nose again. "Alwyn thought he'd protected me before, but Galen got past him then. How do you know it couldn't happen again?"

Squeezing her hand again, Gideon reassured her. "Because Alwyn broke Galen's staff. It was the source of much of his power, and without it, Alwyn will always know if he gets close. We've told you this, Deborah. Please, try to believe us." Gideon cursed the tone of exasperation that had crept into his voice. They may have had this conversation a dozen times, but Deborah's fears were still real. He couldn't just hope they'd go away. Perhaps if he tried a different tack...

"Alwyn has gone over the new house in England, and installed more protective equipment there. He's told me it's a fortress against Technomages now. Even if ten of them worked together, they couldn't get past the barriers he's put in place. And if they did, they'd have to get past me, too. Why don't we get started on the move? Angel's movie has finished filming; she just has a few pick-up scenes to do, then she can join us." Lifting his free hand, Gideon again caressed his wife's face. "Maybe you'll feel safer in another place. Let's go to England. You'll feel better there."

Deborah sniffed again, and tried to smile, this time with more success. "You're right. I think I would feel safer away from here. I've loved this house, but..." Her words ran down, and Gideon finished her sentence for her.

"But it won't ever be the same, will it? Then let's leave this house for Angel to live in when she's working. She can stay here if she wants, or she can join us in England and help us start again. Marcus can start school over there, and Mattie will grow up with an accent just like her mother's." He laughed gently as Deborah's face shifted, showing some discomfort. "Don't worry. I can cope with being surrounded by limeys."

Deborah bit her lip and smiled again. "OK, let's do it. But Matthew, there's something else I want to do. Something I *have* to do, if I'm going to feel in control of my life again."

Gideon looked at his wife curiously. He knew she'd been brooding about something for days and wondered if he was finally going to find out what it was. He remained silent, waiting for

her to continue.

"I've been talking to Danny, and he said as soon as I'm fit, he wants me to start work again, finishing the second book, then getting out and promoting it."

Gideon made a great effort not to allow his irritation to show. He didn't much like Deborah's literary agent, but he had to admit the man was good at his job. The first book was selling well, and Deborah's name was becoming well known. Sometimes it irked him that she'd chosen to write under her maiden name of Montgomery. She had explained that she never wanted to be accused of taking advantage of her relationship with her husband, and that his name was too well known on Earth. Deborah wanted success of her own merits or not at all, and Gideon could understand that.

Covering up his concerns, he smiled and said, "That sounds like a good idea. Well, the writing part, at least. I'm not so sure about the promoting. What would that involve?"

Gideon's stomach turned as Deborah described a tour of bookstores that Danny had planned. He carefully hid his reaction, asking quietly, "Are you sure you'll be strong enough for that? And what about Mattie?"

Deborah looked at him sadly and said, "I won't do anything until I'm strong enough, and until Mattie is strong enough to travel with us. We can hire a nurse to help us, but you will come with me, won't you? Please?"

Gideon found he couldn't refuse, not when she looked at him with the big, golden brown eyes he adored. He had strong misgivings about the plan, but fortunately, Deborah couldn't sense them. He smiled and said, "As soon as Sarah gives the all-clear for you and Mattie, we'll go wherever you want. Just tell me one thing, though. Why is this so important to you?"

He watched as Deborah straightened her shoulders and sat upright on the beach chair. Her face hardened and her eyes turned cold as she spoke, her voice flat and devoid of emotion.

"I won't let him win, Matthew. I won't hide behind Alwyn's defenses, spending the rest of my life covering in fear. If he wants to try again, I'll be right out there where he can see me. Galen stole months of my life from me. He took away my link with my daughter before it was able to form. He took away my ability to ever give you another child. I won't let him take any more away from me. Can you understand that, Matthew? Please?"

Gideon looked into his wife's eyes, now full of pleading and need, and he suppressed all his qualms about her plans, knowing that what she needed was his complete support.

"Of course I understand," he lied. "Whatever you need to do, I'll be there for you, every step of the way."

Taking his wife in his arms, Gideon held her tightly, stroking her hair and whispering his love for her, while he buried his doubts and fears deep inside, and gave thanks that she could no longer sense his feelings.

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four U

[Part 1: Loose Ends](#) [Part 2: Punishment](#)