

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four W - Part 1: Healed with a Kiss

by [The Space Witches](#)



Angel in the role that brought her an Oscar nomination.

Chapter 1

November 2274

"This is Jennifer Billings for ISN Entertainment News, dateline 20th November 2274. It has just been learned that the award winning actress, Angelique Denier, has been rushed to the hospital after collapsing on the set of her latest movie. A statement released by the Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles states that Miss Denier is in a coma after being infected with an unknown virus. Inside sources at the hospital have discovered that a doctor who is a leader in the field of Virology is working on an antidote, but so far with little success. Miss Denier's condition has been listed as critical and if an antidote is not found soon, her chances of recovery seem slim. Further information has been received revealing that Miss Denier is the victim of a murder attempt, deliberately infected with an artificially created virus. As of now, no further details are available, as the Police remain silent as to who is responsible, even though several suspects have been taken in for questioning. ISN will keep you updated as soon as further information is released.

Now onto other news. In Earth Dome today..."

He sat there, silently brooding, chewing the inside of his bottom lip, a strange dark look of concentration on his face, as he watched the film footage fade and move onto the next news

item. Speaking quietly, he instructed the computer to switch the screen off, then he remained silent again as he sat thinking.

For a long time he had wanted her dead, to make her pay for what she had done to him, but things had changed. There was a reason to keep her alive, but besides that, now that her life was actually in danger, something inside him twisted. He couldn't accept the fact that she might actually die. He wasn't going to let that happen. Anyway, if anyone was going to kill Angel it was him; no one else had that right. But for the moment he had exactly what was needed to save her life and he was going to use it.

He stood up abruptly and left his office to make arrangements for his trip. As he left the building, he thought about the future and the reason why he had to save her life. He and Angel were meant to be together. She was the one best suited to give him what he needed. Nothing was going to prevent that from happening, but once he had what he needed from her...

Demon walked into the hospital room and stood staring at the near lifeless body of her sister. Angel lay hooked up to monitors, IV's, the oxygen line that was inserted in her nose to help her breathe, to all the medical technology that was keeping the young woman alive. Demon closed her eyes, forcing back the tears that threatened to fall. She opened her eyes after a few moments then, taking a deep calming breath, she walked to the bed.

As she sat in the chair beside the bed, she took Angel's hand and held it gently in hers. With her free hand, Demon reached out to brush a strand of raven hair away from her sister's deathly pale face, silently talking to her through their link. *[[You can't give up Angel. You've got to fight. You have so much to live for; a good career and people who love you. Please fight!]]* Demon sat there waiting, hoping for a miracle, praying that Angel would open her eyes and smile, telling her sister that she was all right. But nothing happened. Angel just remained lying there, as still as she had been for the last week since she'd slipped into the coma.

"Deborah?" Demon jumped at the sound of her name, and when she saw Matthew walking toward her, she sprang out of the chair, and rushed into his arms. She buried her face in his shoulder, as he held her tightly against him while she sobbed. Only when he felt her go quiet in his arms did he push her slightly away, so that he could place a soft kiss on her lips. Taking her face in his hands, Matthew looked at her quizzically. "I thought you were going back to the house to get a few hours sleep?"

Demon pulled away from his hold on her face and shook her head, not saying anything, as she moved back to sit at Angel's side, once again holding her sister's hand.

Matthew moved to stand by the chair, placing his hand on her shoulder, his voice gentle as he spoke. "You're not going to do Angel any good if you collapse from exhaustion." He looked taken aback when Demon snapped at him, projecting all the pain, anger, sadness and helplessness she felt.

"I'm not leaving her!" As quickly as her temper had flared, it died and Demon turned to look up at her husband wearily, her voice thick with emotion. "I'm sorry, Matthew. I'm... I'm just so afraid that if I leave her, she'll die." Her voice cracked on the last word, and Matthew knelt

beside her, placing his hand over hers.

"Angel is not going to die. She has the best doctors working on finding an antidote. Sarah won't let her die." Gideon gave his wife an encouraging smile, as he lifted his hand to her face to stroke her cheek. She closed her eyes and leaned her face into his touch. He hoped that Deborah didn't pick up on his own feelings of doubt, as his eyes drifted to Angel for a moment, then back to Deborah's face.

Standing, Gideon pulled on Deborah's hand to bring her to her feet. "You really need to get some rest. You're exhausted, and you'll make yourself sick if you don't get some sleep. You've been diving back and forth between here and the house, feeding Mattie, spending time with Marcus, then straight back down here. You haven't slept properly in days, and you'll be no good to the children or your sister unless you do." He saw her open her mouth to protest and he cut her off by placing a finger on her lips. "Just for a few hours. I'll stay with her, I won't leave her side." For a moment, he thought Deborah was going to tell him no, but then she nodded wearily.

"OK, just a few hours. But if there's any change..." Gideon nodded and hugged her to him.

"I'll call you. Promise." He released her, and watched as she turned to her sister to say goodbye.

Demon bent forward, and kissed Angel's forehead, while she projected her thoughts. *[[I'm going to go for a little while, darling, but I'll be back in a few hours. Matthew will stay here with you.]]* She paused for a moment as she touched her forehead to Angel's. When she continued, she spoke aloud in a whisper. "Please, don't leave me, Angel." With one final kiss, Demon straightened and turned to Matthew, who placed his arm around her shoulder and without a word, led her out of Angel's room.

Gideon returned ten minutes later, having seen Deborah off. His heart and mind were heavy with worry for her and Angel. He moved over to the bed and sat down, placing his hand over Angel's. He sat there watching the rise and fall of her breathing and wondered again how this could have happened, and how unfair it was. Just when Angel was finally happy again, she had once again been thrown cruelly into a struggle for survival.

Gideon thought back on the past week. He and Deborah had been enjoying a quiet day together at home in England--the first in a long while, the children having been taken out by their nanny--when they'd received a call from Angel's manager, telling them that she'd collapsed on the set of her new movie and had been rushed to hospital. They'd taken the next shuttle out. Arriving at the hospital, they'd been told that Angel was in ICU, in a coma, her condition critical.

Emotions had run high, as the doctors explained that an unknown virus, which was causing her body to shut down, had infected Angel. Within a day, Gideon had got Sarah Chambers on the case. He would have liked to have Alwyn standing by as well, but the Technomage had gone off with his dragon familiar and his son several weeks before. Sarah had told Gideon and

Deborah that she couldn't contact Alwyn, as he was introducing their three year old son, Jaysen, to the Technomage council. Sarah was at that very moment in the hospital lab, working furiously on finding a cure to the virus, but so far with no success. The virus was unlike anything Sarah had seen before and was proving difficult to pin down.

Gideon had an awful sense of déjà vu, as all the feelings of guilt and helplessness that had assailed him during the second year of the Excalibur's search for a cure to the Drakh plague returned to haunt him. It may have been a planet then and only one person now, but this person was special to him.

Gideon sighed heavily. They had to find the antidote and they had to find it soon. Angel was running out of time. He was desperate enough that if there had been any way of contacting Galen, he would have swallowed all his pride and anger, and asked the Technomage for help. But Galen was no more in reach than Alwyn, less so in fact. Since Galen had tried to kill Deborah over a year before, he had disappeared completely from their lives.

Standing abruptly, Gideon started pacing, cursing under his breath at the man who had done this to Angel. The police had found evidence leading to the arrest of the culprit, who was now safely stowed away in the LA County Jail. A good thing, not only because he'd tried to kill Angel, but behind bars he was protected from Gideon. He continued thinking about the man he wanted to kill, as he paced back and forth at the foot of the bed.

Angel's manager, Peter Williams, had told them that a fan had stalked Angel for the past few months. At first, they'd thought him harmless; the sweet letters of adoration that he'd sent her had flattered Angel. But the letters had turned dark, as the fan started talking about how he would do anything to be with her and that he and Angel were soul mates. At Williams' instruction, Angel had stopped encouraging the man, believing that he would lose interest, but that hadn't happened. The letters kept coming, eventually containing threats to her life, but still they hadn't believed he would do anything.

How wrong Peter had been. Gideon still felt like ramming his fist down the manager's throat for not taking the threats seriously. Angel was now lying in a hospital bed fighting for her life, glaring proof that the man had been serious.

Forensics teams from the local police and Center for Disease Control had been through Angel's house, searching for a possible source of the infection. They had found a half-empty box of chocolates. Scanners indicated that they were heavily laced with highly concentrated traces of the virus. Further searching revealed a note, which although he had tried to disguise his handwriting, experts had proved to be written by the same man who had sent the other letters. There had also been fingerprint and DNA traces, which had led to the identification of the stalker, and his subsequent arrest. At least that was one worry behind them. There was no need to fear he would somehow get to Angel and finish the job. As soon as they had the man behind bars, the police had removed the guard who until then had been a permanent fixture in Angel's hospital room.

Gideon stopped pacing and returned to Angel's side. He felt so many conflicting emotions whenever he was around her. He reached out and ran his thumb gently along her cheekbone, noticing again how the line of her cheek and the set of her jaw were so similar to Deborah. The resemblance between them ended there, but somehow that had always been enough for some of his passion for Deborah to overflow to Angel.

He had always thought that she was one of the most beautiful, desirable women he'd ever known, but he'd always tried to bury those thoughts deep inside him, so that even he didn't remember them. He hadn't always been successful, but the price that had once been paid for his loss of control with Angel had been terrible. He was unwilling to risk that price ever being paid again. So he did his best to hide his feelings for her and to pretend to love her as a brother, when most of the time the last thing he felt was brotherly.

Gideon shook his head. Now wasn't the time to analyze his complicated feelings for his sister-in-law. That wouldn't help him and it wouldn't help Angel. Only a... [Only what, Matt? A miracle?] would save her. Gideon laughed dryly, he didn't believe in miracles, any more than he believed in ghosts. He believed something only happened if you made it happen, and the only thing that would save her now was an antidote.

Gideon decided it was time to see if Sarah had made any progress. He knew it was pointless, that she would have notified him if they'd found anything, but he needed to do something. He hesitated and looked down at Angel. He'd told Deborah that he would remain with her, but staying here like this, just waiting, was driving him crazy.

He reached out and brushed Angel's cheek again. He wanted to say something, but the words were difficult to find. Gideon leaned forward and kissed her gently, whispering, "Stay with us, Angel. We love you. You know even I--in my crazy, fucked up way--I do love you. I've told you that before."

He turned on his heel and left her room. On his way to the elevators he found Angel's ICU nurse and told her where he would be and that he would be back in a little while. Then he entered the elevator and hit the button for the 8th floor.

He paused at the door of Angel's room. Glancing first left then right, making sure the coast was clear, he reached out and opened the door. Pushing the trolley in front of him, he slipped in, closing the door soundlessly behind him and locking it. He didn't want to risk someone walking in on him while he was busy tending to Angel. Then he turned around and for the first time, let his gaze fall upon the comatose figure lying in the bed. A strange expression flickered across his face for a moment, but vanished as his expression once again became set with determination.

Before he turned his full attention to Angel, he wheeled the trolley alongside the bed. Reaching down, he pulled back the covers that hid the bulky object underneath. A smug smile spread across his lips, as he let his fingers touch part of it. He'd known all the trouble he'd gone through to get his hands on this little piece of alien technology would pay off one day. It was going to bring Angel back to the land of the living.

His thoughts now solely on Angel, he turned, letting his eyes take in every detail of her. He sucked in his breath, holding it for a while, before exhaling softly. He reigned in the unexpected feeling of rage he felt at seeing her lying there. Her face was ashen, with prominent dark shadows beneath her eyes. For a moment, another time when she had looked this frail flashed in his mind, a time when she had been beaten and bruised, in an incident that had been entirely his fault.

Pushing that memory aside, he bent forward and kissed her softly on her lips, before he moved to whisper in her ear. "Hello, Angel-Face. It's been a long time. And as always, you've got yourself into trouble again." He straightened and reached down to brush the back of his hand along her cheek.

"But don't you worry, darlin', Lucas is going to fix you right up." He smiled. "Never let it be said that Lucas Buck don't take care of his own..." He paused as he looked around, then reached for the chair, pulling it closer. Before he sat down, Lucas removed the hospital porter's coat he wore and draped it over the back of the chair. For a moment, he thought about the man it belonged to, now lying safely secured in a closet. He'd be unconscious for at least another hour, so there was plenty of time. Then Lucas sat, his eyes fixed intently on Angel's face, looking for the slightest hint that she was aware of who was in the room with her, before he continued, "And you are mine, Angel-Face. Body and soul. That's never changed." Lucas paused again, as he watched her face with an almost tender expression, but then coldness appeared in his eyes, washing away the tenderness, as he lifted his hand to take hold of hers, raising it to his mouth to kiss the tips of her fingers.

When he spoke again, his voice was low and dangerous. "That body belongs to me, darlin', and I've still got uses for it. I ain't gonna let you die... Well, at least not by anyone else's hand. No, that right belongs to me." Lucas stopped talking as he thought for a moment. Then he closed his eyes and let his mind search into Angel's unconscious mind, reading her past thoughts and memories. He opened his eyes slowly when he had confirmed what she had as much as admitted when they had last met on Ceti Gamma III, that she had been the one to betray him all those years ago on Eriadne.

Long ago, Lucas had decided how he would punish her for that betrayal, but things had changed. Now he saw that in the long run it would be better to keep her alive, at least until she had given him what he wanted. So now he had to save her life. And deep down, the thought of Angel dying was not one that Lucas wanted to contemplate. He shook his head and dismissed the feelings that disturbed him when he thought that way.

Lucas knew that Gideon was nearby, and he doubted that old Space Cadet would be pleased to find him there, even if he were saving Angel's life. He couldn't spend too much time there. Lucas looked at Angel for a moment longer. Even as sick as she was, she hadn't stopped being the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. The three years since he'd last seen her in person had only made her more beautiful. Lucas shook his head again. She wouldn't remain that way if he didn't get to work.

Stroking his thumb against her hand one last time, he let go and reached for the alien-healing device. Pulling the trolley closer, he picked up one of the cuffs and gently attached it to Angel's wrist. Then he unbuttoned the sleeve of his shirt and rolled it up to just above the elbow. Picking up the other cuff, Lucas stopped short of attaching it to his wrist.

He knew that there was a great risk in using this device. He'd learned all about its existence when he and Angel had lived on Babylon 5. It had taken a lot of resources and money to get hold of it and have it smuggled off the station, once he'd settled himself comfortably on a new world. Lucas knew that even a few minutes of exposure to it would be a risk to his own life, as it transferred some of his life force into Angel. He'd heard the story about a Ranger who had given up his life in order to save the life of the woman he loved. Lucas arched an eyebrow and drawled softly, "Well, don't expect miracles, darlin'. I ain't about to go that far." He'd give her

just enough to get her well.

Without further hesitation, Lucas attached the other cuff to his wrist. Placing his hand over Angel's, he fixed his eyes on her face for a moment, then turned his attention back to the device. With his free hand, he held down the switch that would activate it. At first, he felt nothing. Then a strange, indescribable sensation began to spread throughout his body, starting from the center of his chest, spreading outwards. The arm attached to the device began to tingle. A feeling of heaviness began to wash over him, as his body began to drain of his life force. Lucas began to feel more tired than he'd ever felt in his entire life. The urge to close his eyes and lay his head on the bed was strong, but he resisted. There was still no sign from Angel or the monitors attached to her, indicating that there was any improvement. He wasn't going to stop until he was sure it had worked.

As one minute turned into two, Lucas could feel himself growing weaker. Then he saw it. Angel's hand twitched, and a nearly inaudible sound escaped her throat. His eyes snapped up to the ECG monitor, and he could see the numbers increasing, as Angel's pulse and heart rate began to gain strength. She was still unconscious, but her vitals were getting stronger. She was beginning to surface from her coma, as the virus was erased from her system. The machine was doing its job.

Reaching out an unsteady hand, Lucas switched off the device, and removed the cuffs from his and Angel's wrists, placing them on top of the machine. Then he slumped back into the chair, completely drained of energy. For a while, he sat there, eyes closed and unmoving. He had to admit to himself that he'd underestimated the stories about the healing device. Lucas opened his eyes to watch Angel. She was still again. He frowned at his eyes drifted back up to the monitors. The readings had leveled off. For a second, he began to doubt that the machine had worked as well as he'd thought it had, but he shook that thought away. The machine had done its job, now it was Angel's turn to make that final step towards recovery.

Leaning forward in the chair, he rested his lower arms on the bed, and kissed Angel softly on her forehead, then whispered close to her ear. "You better damn well live after this, Angel. If you die, I'll make your afterlife a livin' hell."

Angel could feel herself floating upwards, no longer weighted down in the darkness. The pain she had been experiencing began to fade. Out of the darkness she could hear a deep voice, faint, but as she began to lift up from the darkness it became stronger. A familiar voice that she'd waited for so long to hear. Then it was quiet again, but she could sense a presence in front of her. She kept moving forwards, searching for the voice that had guided her out of the darkness.

She slowly began to regain consciousness. Her only movement was in her eyes, the lids flickering as she tried to open them. But Angel was finding it difficult. Her eyelids felt heavy, as though weighted down by some invisible force. With an effort, Angel finally managed to open them. She had to blink several times to get her eyes to focus.

Lying still for a moment, a low peeping sound began to register in her disoriented mind. Angel turned her head; a task which itself proved rather difficult. Her head felt heavy and the muscles in her neck stiff and resistant to movement, but finally she managed, and let her eyes

follow the length of a white line from her arm, up to its end in an IV bag. Her eyes closed again, a wave of exhaustion washing over her, as she tried to understand what was happening. Willing her eyes open again, she looked up and found what was making the peeping sound. It was an EKG... Angel frowned, [No, that's not right... It's an ECG monitor.] A small, proud smile appeared on her face, strangely pleased that her befuddled mind was working well enough for her to figure that out without help. Then she realized that she was in a hospital room.

But where was THAT voice? Or had she just imagined it? She tried to figure out why it couldn't be possible for the voice to be real, but it was so hard to think. Still, even if she couldn't hear the voice, there was a familiar presence in the room with her. Angel turned her head slowly to look around the room.

Her gaze froze when it came to rest on the man sitting slumped back in the chair beside her bed, his eyes closed. [Matt?]. Then her breath caught in her throat, as something about his appearance set her heart racing. Despite the fatigue that showed clearly on his face, she saw that he was younger than Gideon. There was no gray in his hair, as there now was in Gideon's hair. His style of dress was also different... familiar. But it couldn't be possible. Angel closed her eyes. She had to be dreaming, or hallucinating. He wasn't really there. It couldn't be him! If it were, she'd be dead by now. [Wouldn't I?]

Angel opened her eyes again. She was finding it harder to stay awake, but she had to. She had to see if this was a hallucination.

Her eyes once again fixed themselves on the man in the chair. He was still there. Angel opened her mouth to try and call his name, but found it impossible to speak. Her throat was tight and dry, as were her lips. She tried to swallow away the dryness, hoping that it would help her voice to work, but only a small croaking sound came out as she tried to say his name.

Lucas had been sitting, trying to regain enough strength to get himself moving. He knew that it was just a matter of time before Space Cadet returned and he had to be gone before that happened. He may no longer be wanted for the murder of Dureena's child, but he knew that Gideon and the others were still out for his blood. He wasn't about to let his future plans get derailed by getting himself caught.

When he heard a small croak coming from the bed, he opened his eyes to find a familiar pair of the bluest eyes watching him carefully. He remained silent, as he let Angel look at him. Lucas could see she was confused, disorientated and trying to figure out whether he was real or not. He decided to give her a moment, before he let her know that she wasn't imagining him.

Angel watched his eyes open. Her breath caught in her throat, as hazel eyes as familiar to her as her own met hers and held them. Her eyes were glued to him as he leaned forward in his chair, and for an instant, she thought he was going to reach out his hand and touch her. [This has to be a dream!] Angel was beginning to feel frustrated as it became harder and harder to remain conscious, and frustrated because Lucas just watched her closely, saying nothing.

Again Angel tried to speak. This time she managed to lick her dry lips, moistening them a little and clearing her throat. "Lucas?" Even to her own ears, her voice sounded hoarse and weak.

Lucas smiled that slow, lazy smile that she remembered so well. Angel's stomach lurched with nervous apprehension, and her hand jumped, as she felt the warmth of Lucas' hand as he placed it over hers. She tried to ignore the heaviness that was pulling on her eyes, wanting to drag her back into unconsciousness as he leaned further forward in the chair.

"Hello, love. Have a nice nap?" Lucas asked in that teasingly sexy drawl that she had only heard in her dreams for the past three years. Angel's mind was reeling, unable to form a coherent thought as he gave her another lazy smile. She tried to say something, but Lucas lifted his hand from hers to place a finger on her lips, silencing her. The feel of his finger resting gently on her lips, and his eyes looking intently at her, were the last things Angel remembered, as finally the combination of her weakness and the sheer shock and confusion of his presence caused her to slip back into unconsciousness. But this time, only the unconsciousness of a deep sleep.

Lucas smiled, and let his finger trace along Angel's full lips. She was out of danger; he had accomplished what he had come to do. He turned his glance to the alien healing device. Damn thing could sure knock a man down, but it had done its job. He'd ensured Angel's future. Lucas turned his eyes back to her and stood up. As soon as he did so, he had to brace his hands on the bed to steady himself, smiling at his own temporary weakness. Well, he'd get over it. Feeling his legs becoming steadier, Lucas straightened, turned, and covered the device. Turning again, he picked up the porter's coat and put it on.

Lucas turned his attention back to Angel, pleased with the soft rise and fall of her breathing as she slept. Already her appearance was improving, as a healthy color began to return to her cheeks. Standing over her, he watched her for a while, thinking about part of the reason he had gone to such lengths to save her life. Raising his hand, Lucas placed it over her body and closed his eyes, letting his mind search. He inhaled deeply, as he found what he was looking for and sighed slowly with satisfaction. "Not yet, but one day soon..."

Opening his eyes, Lucas smiled. Picking up Angel's hand, he held it gently as he looked down at her. "You're going to be all right now, darlin', but as much as I'd like to stay and catch up with you, I have to go. But don't you worry, one day you'll see me again." He put Angel's hand down, resting it across her belly. Bending forward, Lucas whispered into her ear. "We're meant to be together." Lifting his head, he kissed her forehead, and as he straightened up, he let his thumb caress her cheek one last time. Then turning a little unsteadily, he grabbed the trolley and wheeled it toward the door without a backward glance.

As the door closed softly, Angel came awake again, Lucas' name on her lips. She had woken up sensing a kiss on her forehead and the gentle caress on her cheek, wanting to say something to him, but the room was empty. Struggling to lift her head, she looked around to find Lucas, but the room showed no trace of him ever having been there. For a moment, Angel thought she could smell the familiar scent of him, that spicy musk that he shared with Gideon, but it was gone before she could decide if it had really been there or not. Angel closed her eyes. [A dream,

it's all just been a dream.] Sleep came to claim her, and as she drifted away, Angel was unaware of the single tear that slid down her cheek.

Nurse Isobel Cortez continued ticking off the list of meds for the day, as she stood behind the counter of the nurses' station. As she looked away from the clock, she watched as a porter wheeled a trolley up to the elevator. His back was to her, so she couldn't tell who it was, and she wished he would turn around. If it was Charlie, she planned on asking him to join her for a cup of coffee. [About time for a coffee break.] Isobel stood waiting and watching as the door of the elevator opened and the man wheeled the trolley in, then he turned to punch a button on the panel. Her eyes widened in surprise as she recognized the man as Matthew Gideon, or at least she thought she recognized him. He looked younger somehow, despite the fact that he looked haggard and tired. Understandable, considering the amount of time Gideon had spent at the hospital without getting any rest. He wasn't aware of her watching him in the brief moment that the door remained opened.

Isobel continued watching him, as the door began to close. Only when the elevator had begun to head for the ground floor, did it register in her mind how odd it was that Gideon was dressed in a porter's coat, and was pushing a trolley with something large on it covered with a sheet. She shook her head, and rubbed a hand over her eyes. "I must be seeing things!" First, Captain Gideon--she still called him that in her mind, although he'd made it clear that he preferred Matt or Matthew. But how could she call the man who had saved humanity from the Drakh plague by his first name? It didn't seem quite right somehow. Isobel shook her head, recalling her thought to the present. First, Captain Gideon was supposed to be down on the 8th floor, and second, she had been at the nurses' station the whole time since he left, and she hadn't seen him return. And why would he put on a porter's coat and be wheeling a hospital trolley around?

Isobel decided she was imagining things. [Time for that coffee break.] She turned to the other nurse who was sitting behind her, entering data into a computer and asked, "Cassie, can you hold the fort for awhile? I'm going to take my coffee break."

Cassie smiled and nodded. "Can do, as long as you bring a coffee back for me?"

Isobel nodded. "Will be my pleasure." Isobel moved out from behind the counter. "I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

Cassie waved her off. "Take thirty, you deserve it."

Isobel smiled her thanks, and walked out from behind the counter and over to the elevator. She pushed the up button, and waited for the door to open. When it did, she walked forward, gasping as she hit something warm and solid. A pair of strong male hands reached out to hold her upper arms, steadying her as she lost her balance, preventing her from falling on her backside.

Once steadied, she looked up to find Captain Gideon smiling at her, concern showing in his eyes. "Are you all right?" Isobel was momentarily taken aback, as she stepped back and looked him over, taking in how he was dressed. Same clothes as he'd had on when he went to see Dr. Chambers. [No porter's coat or trolley.] Only when she heard him calling her name, did she

look up into his face and reply, a little embarrassed.

"Ah... yes I'm fine..." Isobel hesitated, then she went on to explain. "I'm just trying to figure out if I'm seeing things again."

Gideon smiled at the young nurse. "Seeing things?"

Isobel laughed again, feeling a little flustered after having collided with Gideon. Although not her usual type, she had to admit he was incredibly attractive. Isobel mentally shook her head and reprimanded herself. [Down girl. He's happily married.]. She noticed Gideon watching her expectantly, so she explained what she had imagined seeing, less than five minutes before.

Gideon stood and listened. When she got to the part about how she had thought 'he' had looked younger, a cold rage and fear came over him. Grabbing Isobel's arm, he forced control over his voice as he asked her. "Is there anything else about him you remember?" When Isobel hesitated, he shook her arm roughly. "It's important!"

Only when Isobel recoiled from him, and cried out in fear, did Gideon realize that he was hurting her. Looking up, he saw the other nurse watching them wide-eyed. Releasing Isobel quickly, he softened his tone. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you, but please, this is very important. Is there anything else?"

Isobel rushed to tell him about the trolley, answering his questions about it quickly. Her mind lurched in confusion, and before Gideon could ask anything else, she cut in quickly, "But I was just imagining things... I'm sure it wasn't real." Isobel's eyes widened at Gideon when he swore loudly.

"That son-of-a-bitch!" Gideon's mind raced at light speed as he realized just who Isobel had really seen. Immediately, he thought of Angel, and another wave of fear washed over him. Rushing forward, he barked at Cassie, "Get Dr. Chambers up here now! Then go and check on Miss Denier and don't leave her side until Dr. Chambers gets here!" Cassie jumped, but used to doctors barking orders at her, she didn't hesitate as she hit the comm. button for the lab.

Meanwhile, Gideon had turned to Isobel. "You get hold of Security. Tell them we have an extremely dangerous man in the hospital. I want all the exits to this place sealed and for them to detain any man looking like me!" Isobel jumped, and rushing round to the other side of the counter, she picked up and activated the comm. unit used only for security purposes.

Gideon turned and raced to the elevator, hitting the down button, every muscle in his body tight as he waited for the elevator to reach his floor. When it did, he moved forward, then hesitated. Turning, Gideon looked in the direction of Angel's room, into which Cassie had just disappeared. He was torn. He wanted to go to Angel, to make sure that Lucas hadn't finished the job the stalker had started, but at the same time, he wanted to go after the son-of-a-bitch who had dared to show his face again after all this time.

Gideon suddenly lashed out and hit the wall, then turned and ran to Angel's room. He had to make sure Lucas hadn't killed her. As Gideon rushed into the room, he came to an abrupt halt as he saw Cassie leaning over Angel, checking her IV and monitor. "Is she all right?"

Cassie jumped at the sound of the voice and turned around to see Gideon standing directly behind her. She nodded. "She's fine..."

Gideon cut her off. "Get Dr. Chambers to check her over thoroughly just to be safe." He looked down at Angel, his heart still racing with the fear. He looked up at the ECG monitor, just to reassure himself that her heart was still beating. Then he looked back down at her and reached his hand out to stroke her cheek. Gideon wanted to stay with her and wait for Sarah, but the need to go after Lucas was too strong. Drawing his hand back, he turned to Cassie again.

"Don't leave her side until Dr. Chambers gets here, understand?" Cassie nodded and watched as Gideon looked one last time at Angel, then turned on his heel and raced out of the room.

Gideon reached the elevator and hit the call button. When it arrived, he rushed inside and pressed the button for the ground floor. Gideon knew Sarah was on her way, and he trusted her more than anyone to make sure that Angel was all right. Besides, if the worst had happened Sarah would be able to help Angel more than he could. Gideon closed his eyes, forcing away those thoughts. Angel was all right. [She has to be!].

No, he would be more help going after Lucas. That was what he was best suited for. "If you've harmed one hair on her head, you bastard, you're a dead man!" Gideon's face was set hard, his jaw clenched tight as he waited for the elevator to take him to ground level. Dark thoughts of what he would do to Lucas flashed through his mind. He smiled cruelly, as he thought about how much he would enjoy making Lucas suffer before he killed him, for all the pain he had caused to Angel and everyone else Gideon loved and cared for.

Gideon leaned back against the wall of the elevator, feeling weary, angry and frustrated. He'd spent the last hour with hospital Security going over all the exits, where people had been detained, searching amongst them for an all too familiar face, but Lucas had disappeared, vanished into thin air as if he had never been there. How he'd managed to get out of the hospital, past security, was a mystery. Then again, it didn't really surprise Gideon. Lucas had managed to escape from the Excalibur, a task much harder than getting out of a hospital.

Gideon swore under his breath for the hundredth time. Working with Security had been frustrating, the Security Chief less than believing that Gideon was right about Lucas' presence at the hospital. But Gideon had been able to prove it to him, when a porter had been found unconscious in a supply closet. He'd regained consciousness just as Gideon had arrived in the emergency room. Seeing Gideon, the man, Charlie Johnson, had identified him as his attacker. After some questioning, and assurances that Gideon couldn't have attacked him, Charlie had confirmed the slight differences in appearance, including the fact that the man looked younger and his voice was different.

It confirmed beyond a doubt that Lucas had been there, but he was gone, having disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. Before coming up to the ICU, Gideon had contacted local police, informing them about Lucas, and requesting that an All Points Bulletin be initiated. Gideon opened his eyes. He didn't want to think it, but past experience told him that Lucas wouldn't be caught.

The elevator door opened and Gideon pushed himself from the wall, then walked out in the

hallway towards Angel's room. His pace slowed. He didn't know what he would do if Angel was worse than before. He'd never forgive himself. He had promised Deborah that he wouldn't leave her side, but he had. He'd left Angel alone, for anyone to just walk in. Left her unprotected for Lucas to get to her.

Gideon stopped, just a few feet away from Angel's door as he thought about Deborah. He had yet to call her. It wasn't something he was looking forward to doing, especially if something had happened to Angel. How could he tell her that Lucas had returned? Would Deborah ever be able to forgive him, if Lucas had harmed Angel, because he hadn't been there, as promised, to look after her? Would he be able to forgive himself? He knew he would have to call Deborah, but decided to wait until he knew, for better or worse, how Angel was.

He started walking towards Angel's room but just before he reached the door, Sarah Chambers emerged and closed the door behind her. There was a look of bewilderment on her face. She was unaware of Gideon standing looking at her. Gideon called her name softly, aware that as he called, his voice sounded shaky.

Sarah looked up in surprise. She'd been lost in thought about what she'd found when she'd reached Angel's room. She couldn't explain it, and she sure as hell was struggling to believe it.

"Is... Is Angel OK?" Sarah realized what Gideon must be thinking and smiled, for the first time letting her relief and happiness show.

"She's more than OK, Matt. I don't know how, but Angel is out of the coma. She's going to be all right." Sarah smiled widely at Gideon.

Gideon looked across at Sarah in stunned silence for a moment, then finally found his voice. "Angel's OK? She's out of danger?"

Sarah nodded. "I sent some blood samples down to the lab to be sure, but Matt, it's like she never had the virus. All signs of the deterioration it was causing in her body are gone! She's out of her coma and her vital signs are strengthening by the minute."

Sarah waited as her words sunk in. Then she watched as Gideon's face lit up with joy at the good news. For the first time in the past week, Gideon looked his usual self. He hugged Sarah hard. "She's all right? I have to see her!" He moved forward to get past Sarah to go inside, but Sarah grabbed his arm, stopping him short. Gideon turned to her questioningly.

"She's asleep and I think it's best to let her rest for now." She pulled on Matt's arm, and indicated for him to take a seat on the bench against the wall opposite Angel's room.

Gideon was about to argue when Sarah explained. "She's very weak, Matt. Coming out of a coma isn't as simple as they make it out to be in the movies. A person is very weak and will sleep quite a bit in the first hours. I want her to get as much rest as possible now. Her sister will be here in a little while..." Sarah paused as she smiled at the memory of Demon's excitement when she had called her, after having checked Angel over and finding her improved. She'd instructed the nurse to stay with Angel, while she went and made the good news call. The look on Demon's face had been incredible, her excitement, joy and relief tangible. Sarah had barely had a chance to say goodbye to her, as Demon began getting herself ready to come back to the

hospital.

Sarah came out of her thoughts when she heard Gideon calling her name and asking her a question. "You've called Deborah already?"

Sarah smiled and nodded. "I don't think Demon would have forgiven me if I'd waited. She should be here soon." Sarah saw Gideon's face fall. She could guess what it was that had upset him. It also provided her with the chance to ask him what had been going on. The urgent call to come and see Angel, Gideon disappearing, and most of all she wanted to know what Isobel Cortez had been going on about. "Matt? Do you want to tell me what happened?"

Gideon was silent for a moment, then he sighed and nodded. "Lucas Buck was here."

Sarah's head snapped back in shock. "What?"

Gideon shifted in his seat, his eyes flickered over to the door of Angel's room, and then he looked back at Sarah and told her what had happened since he'd returned from seeing her in the lab.

Sarah was stunned as she listened to Gideon's explanation. Now she understood what the panic had been about. She also realized why Gideon was so upset. Sarah couldn't help wondering about the connection between Lucas' appearance and Angel's miraculous recovery. She'd discovered some faint bruising on one of Angel's wrists and suspected this had something to do with her improvement. Sarah couldn't be sure. If it was what she thought, it would explain why Angel had gotten better so suddenly, but it confused her. For five years, they had believed that when Lucas reappeared, it would be to kill Angel, and take Marcus... not to risk his life to save her. She waited for Gideon to finish talking, wondering if he would believe her when she voiced her theory.

"I should never have left her room, Sarah. Lucas had free access to her." Gideon paused, then asked anxiously, "Are you sure she's all right? There isn't anything you missed? Lucas could have injected something into her, something that could take effect later."

Sarah shook her head. "I'm positive, Matt." She hesitated, wondering if now was the time to tell Gideon what she thought. "Matt, I don't think Lucas was here to harm Angel, I think..."

Gideon cut her off before she could finish. "How can you say that Sarah? Maybe he was interrupted before he could do anything, or he suddenly had an attack of conscience and decided he wouldn't do anything to her when she was so helpless. I mean that would figure. Lucas is the type who would rather have his victim aware of what he was doing. He would want to make her suffer first. Angel told us as much many times. Lucas wouldn't kill Angel outright, but make her pay before he finally killed her." Gideon stood up and started pacing. "You say you don't think he came here to harm her? That doesn't make sense. What other reason would he have to risk showing his face?" Gideon turned to stare at Sarah, hands on his hips, his expression one of disbelief while he waited for her to explain.

Sarah stood up slowly. "I know you're not going to believe this, Matt. To be honest I'm having a hard time believing it myself, but strangely it seems to be the only explanation. Angel's remarkable recovery and Lucas being here, I don't think they're a coincidence."

Gideon looked at her incredulously. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I think Lucas came here to save Angel's life."

Gideon shook his head. "You've got to be joking!" It was said more as a statement than a question.

Sarah shook her head in return, her expression serious. "I'm not joking, Matt. I really do think that Lucas came here to help Angel, not harm her."

Gideon snorted. "You're right, I don't believe you. God, what makes you even think that, let alone believe it? You're the best in the field of Virology and you haven't been able to create an antidote. How could Lucas cure Angel, unless in the past five years he's become a doctor with a better knowledge of viruses than you?"

Sarah opened her mouth to respond, but she wasn't given a chance as Gideon continued talking as well as pacing. Seeing she wouldn't get a chance to speak until Matt had gotten off his chest whatever he was going to say, Sarah sat down on the bench, watching and listening as he paced back and forth in front of her, clearly trying to work out the contradiction she had created.

"We all believe what Angel is sure of, that one day Lucas will try to kill her for betraying him back on Eriadne five years ago. It doesn't make sense, that he would do the total opposite instead. Does it? Why would Lucas suddenly save Angel's life instead of taking it?" Gideon stopped pacing and looked at Sarah.

Sarah thought for a moment. It was true. Lucas saving Angel's life did go totally against what they had previously believed. She considered her answer before sharing it with the Gideon. "Did it ever occur to you that maybe Lucas came to save her life because he loves her?"

Gideon snorted loudly. "You have to have a heart to love someone, and Lucas Buck sure as hell doesn't have one of those. The things he's done, and how he nearly destroyed Angel, are proof of that." He shook his head. "When you love someone, Sarah, you don't threaten them, or hurt them as much as Lucas hurt Angel. Lucas probably can't even spell the word love, let alone feel it."

Sarah arched an eyebrow at the vehemence she heard in Gideon's tone. "Well, if not for love, what then?" She rested her arms on her knees and leaned forward waiting for Gideon's explanation.

"Anything but love... He probably heard she was dying, and in that evil, twisted mind of his, saw someone cheating him out of what was rightfully his. So he comes here and saves Angel's life, so that at some future point in time, when he is good and ready, he can be the one to kill her."

Gideon felt cold at the thought, and again guilt washed over him, as he thought about Lucas having evaded capture again. Maybe if he hadn't waited to find out if Angel was all right, he might have caught Lucas. But then he would have felt guilty if he hadn't checked on Angel before doing anything else. Gideon shook his head, Lucas had appeared, and once again everything had gone to hell in a hand-basket.

"That's pretty cold, Matt."

Gideon shrugged and sighed. "That's Lucas." For a moment, neither said anything, as they both tried to figure out Lucas' motivation for returning to save Angel's life. Gideon finally broke the silence, as he joined Sarah on the bench. "Whatever that bastard's reasons, I still don't understand how he could accomplish what you haven't been able to, but something makes me think you have an idea?"

Sarah nodded, and leaned back on the bench. "Remember what Marcus Cole did for Susan Ivanova?" Gideon nodded as he remembered Angel retelling the story of how Marcus had saved Ivanova's life, after she had been mortally wounded in the final battle against Earth. The Ranger had gotten hold of a very powerful and dangerous alien healing device, which could transfer one person's life force to another. Marcus had done exactly that, saving Ivanova's life but with tragic consequences. Gideon remembered when he had met Susan Ivanova and how she'd told him about the guilt she'd carried around for years afterwards.

Gideon frowned and leaned forward before speaking. "But Marcus died, Sarah, that machine sucked the life out of him. Lucas was very much alive when he walked out of here."

Sarah nodded. "Yes, I know. Stephen Franklin told me this story years ago when we were working on the cure, and he also told me of other incidents involving the healing device. One of those times, the device was used to save Michael Garibaldi. That time, Sheridan and Franklin each hooked themselves up to the device and..."

Gideon prevented Sarah from continuing, by raising a hand. "Wait... But Sheridan and Franklin are still alive. If using the device kills the person giving the life force, how did they survive?"

Sarah continued to explain. "That's just it. If used correctly, and very carefully, a person can give just enough life force to save a life, without it killing them. You told me that Isobel saw Lucas pushing a trolley with something large on it beneath a sheet, and that she said Lucas looked tired and drained? That would be the after-effects of using the device. Franklin described a pattern of light bruising on the wrists from where the cuffs had been attached. Angel herself found traces of those bruises still on Marcus' wrist when she revived him. I found those same markings on one of Angel's wrists."

Gideon frowned and sat back before he spoke. "And you think that Lucas used this alien healing device on her?"

Sarah nodded. "It would explain her 'miraculous' recovery."

"This is unbelievable. But I don't understand. How did Lucas find out about it? And where did he get his hands on it?" Gideon's mind was working overtime, digesting what Sarah had told him.

Sarah sighed. "Well, Lucas did spend time on Babylon 5, in particular in Down Below, which is where Franklin found the device. I know Franklin tried to keep its existence secret, because of its dangerous power. But it's more than likely that there were stories about it and that there are people who knew about Marcus Cole and what he did. Lucas could have heard about them and somehow got his hands on the device or one like it."

Gideon shook his head. "If this was coming from anyone but you, Sarah, and if I hadn't known about Marcus Cole, I don't think I would believe it."

"Believe me, Matt, if I hadn't heard it from Stephen Franklin myself, I wouldn't believe it either, but that device does exist, and I really believe that is what Lucas used to cure Angel."

Gideon closed his eyes for a moment, as he realized further what that meant, then opened them and looked at Sarah. "So you're saying that Lucas not only saved Angel's life, but that he risked his own to do it?"

Sarah nodded.

Gideon smiled dryly. "I'm sure you'll forgive me if I find it hard to believe?"

Sarah smiled back, then stood up. "Oh, I understand that..."

Before she could continue, they both heard the elevator door opening and the sound of running feet. Gideon turned to watch Deborah racing toward them, her face glowing with happiness. She flung herself into his arms, kissing him passionately, before turning to Sarah, tears shining in her eyes.

"How can I ever thank you enough, Sarah? You saved my sister's life!"

Demon grabbed Sarah and Matthew by the hand and dragged them both into Angel's rooms, ignoring their protests. She had to see Angel and it had to be *now*! No one was going to tell her that it would be bad for Angel to wake up to the sight of people she loved waiting by her bedside.

She let go of their hands when they were inside the room and rushed to Angel's bed. Gently, she reached out and with the lightest possible touch, stroked the back of her sister's hand. The contact was enough to strengthen their mental link to the point where she could feel Angel's mind, feel that she was now only asleep, not gone far away as she had been when in the coma.

Demon turned to Sarah and Matthew who stood silently watching her, tears now streaming down her smiling face. She whispered, "She's better. Much better. Thank you." Turning back to Angel, Demon watched as her sister's eyelids fluttered and her eyes opened. She took Angel's hand and clasped it gently, as the younger woman focused on her older sister's face.

"Demon?" The voice was barely audible and sounded raw and dry.

Demon watched as Sarah joined her by the side of the bed, and lifted a beaker of water from the bedside table. Placing the straw gently between Angel's lips, Sarah encouraged her to drink. She smiled down at Angel. "I always seem to be saying that to you when you wake up, don't I?"

Angel smiled and sipped at the water, then looked up at Demon. "What happened? Why am I here?" Her voice was stronger this time, and Demon watched as color gradually made its way back into her cheeks.

Demon could no longer control her feelings. She flung herself onto the bed beside her sister and

hugged her gently, crying as she whispered. "I thought I'd lost you, Angel. I thought they'd taken you away from me again. I couldn't bear to lose you again." Waves of fear, and mixed sadness and joy swept through the room, as Demon started to send.

The tall blonde felt herself being lifted from the bed and held tightly. She buried her head in Matthew's shoulder as he kissed her forehead and stroked her hair. "Shh, calm down. You're sending. You'll have half the hospital in tears if you go on like that."

Demon gazed up at her husband, adoringly. "But I'm happy! Why should that make everyone cry?"

He smiled at her and kissed her gently. "Don't ask me how you do it, but trust me, put a lid on it or we'll be up to our knees in salt water."

Demon could sense that he was using his words to cover some deeper feelings, but for the moment she was too happy to probe further. She turned back to Angel and sat by her bed, pulling Matthew along with her. "Angel, look. Here's Matthew who's stayed with you every moment when I wasn't here." She turned and smiled at Sarah. "And Sarah is here too. She saved you, Angel, she cured the virus that was killing you."

Demon again sensed the discomfort that both Matthew and Sarah seemed to be feeling, but continued, "We called John, Luke and Lily, but they're so far away on the Excalibur that the message has probably only just got to them. Now we'll be able to send them good news. Ilas, Max and Dureena are still out on their latest expedition, but they all sent their best wishes." She leaned forward to gently hug Angel again, then when her sister asked again what had happened to her, Demon explained about the infected chocolates. Angel confirmed receiving them and remembered eating some before she left for the studios that day. She also remembered feeling dizzy and sick on the set, but couldn't remember anything further until she woke up in the hospital room.

"Except..." Angel paused.

Demon smiled and encouraged her. "Except what, darling? Did you hear me through our link? I tried to reach you but couldn't tell if you could hear me."

Angel shook her head. "No, not that. It's just I thought I woke up a bit earlier, before you were here and I saw..." Her eyes shifted to where Gideon stood behind Demon. "I thought I saw..." She stumbled to a halt again, then spoke more firmly. "No, it must have been a dream."

Demon frowned slightly, wondering what this 'dream' could have been about and wishing for the millionth time that she could sense her sister's feelings as she could sense everybody else. As she could sense Sarah and Matthew right now, and what she was sensing started to seriously disturb her. They were both trying to suppress guilt and anxiety, which didn't make sense. Why didn't they share her joy? She decided that as soon as they left Angel's room she would get to the bottom of it.

Smiling gently at Angel, Demon brushed a strand of hair back from her forehead and kissed her. "I hope it was a nice dream anyway. How do you feel now?"

Angel smiled weakly. "Exhausted. I never knew that lying in a hospital bed doing nothing could be so tiring."

Sarah stepped forward at once. "You've been very sick, Angel, and you'll feel pretty groggy for quite some time. What you need now is sleep, so I'm going to drag Demon and Matthew away and leave you to it. Don't worry; someone will always be close by. If you need anything, just call or push this." Sarah put a small call button in Angel's hand. "Now sleep"

Demon watched as Angel smiled and nodded, her eyes closing as they watched. She looked up at Sarah and whispered, "Can't I stay with her while she sleeps?"

Sarah smiled and whispered back. "Later. Leave her for a few minutes until she's really gone off, then you can come back and sit with her."

Demon stood and left the room quietly, Sarah and Matthew on her heels.

Gideon braced himself as Sarah pulled the door to Angel's room closed behind them. Having spent five years living with Deborah, he knew what was coming.

"So what's going on then?" She stood with her hands on her hips, glaring at him and Sarah. There was a part of Gideon that loved it when she got angry, that loved to see her eyes flaring into green, her head drop and that fierce glower cross her face. It was the same part of him that loved to gamble, to live dangerously, to bet everything on the roll of the dice. Now was *not* the time to indulge that part of him.

He moved toward her, arms ready to hold her, but she stepped back, still glaring at him. [Strike one. She's not falling for that one today. Well, it was worth a try.] Before now, Gideon had succeeded in heading off a storm by distracting his wife physically. [Although I'm not sure the hospital staff would approve if I started making love to her in the corridor.]

The silence was lengthening and Gideon could see that Deborah was getting impatient. She asked again, "Come on, out with it. The two of you are oozing guilt. You're like two naughty school children who've been caught doing something you shouldn't. Tell me what happened."

He looked at Sarah, who stared back, her expression clearly saying, 'She's your wife. You deal with her.' [Thanks a bunch, Sarah.]

Gideon tried again. "It's nothing important. Just something private between Sarah and me."

He wasn't surprised when Deborah snorted her contempt. [Strike two. That was pathetic, Matt. Is that the best you can do?]

"Private? If it involves Angel, then it involves me. Now are you going to tell me, or am I going to get *really* mad?"

Gideon flinched. Now he was in trouble. Maybe if he went on the offensive...

"Look, this isn't fair. You know damn well you shouldn't be reading our feelings. That's why they brought the rules in to prevent telepaths from scanning people. It's an invasion of privacy and I may be used to it, but Sarah shouldn't have to answer to you. Quit it." He watched as Deborah took a deep breath and wondered which way she'd go. She might just back down and apologize to Sarah or she might...

"How dare you! This is my sister's life we're talking about and you're keeping secrets from me. How am I supposed to stop myself from sensing what you feel when you're both broadcasting at top volume? How dare you accuse me of invading your privacy! I'd much prefer not to know what you're feeling, particularly when you're trying to cover something up and deceive me. Now tell me what the hell is going on here!" Deborah's voice had risen in volume with every sentence and Gideon could see that she was now on the verge of projecting her anger for everyone to feel.

[Strike three and you're out. Time to come clean and take the consequences.]

"OK, calm down and I'll tell you. But let's find somewhere a bit more private, shall we? I think we've provided enough entertainment for everyone already today." He was acutely aware that Isobel and Cassie were watching them curiously from the nurses' station down the corridor. If Deborah lost control and tried to punch him out again, he'd rather it happened in private. [At least this time I'm already in hospital. Sarah can put me back together again quickly.]

Gideon gently took Deborah's arm and steered her into a nearby visiting room, which was fortunately empty. He was relieved when she let him do it. She hadn't totally lost it yet. Sarah followed them quietly and closed the door behind them.

Gideon kept his hold on Deborah's arm and pulled her round to face him. She'd calmed a little now he'd promised to tell her what was going on, and he took advantage of that to kiss her gently. He knew how susceptible she was to his touch and his kisses, and at this point he wanted to use every trick available to him, to keep her temper under control.

Deborah looked at him seriously, her voice quieter but still determined. "Don't try it, Matthew. Not right now. I know what you're trying to do and just this once it isn't going to work."

Gideon smiled to himself as he thought, [You are well and truly busted, Matt,] then went on to explain what had happened. He kept hold of her arm, running his hand gently across her skin as he talked, hoping he could soothe her. He explained how he'd gone to see Sarah and saw Deborah's nostrils flare as she realized he'd left Angel alone. [I'll pay for that one later,] he thought, as he watched her expression. He then went on to explain how Lucas had been seen by the nurse. Before he could continue, Deborah exploded, wrenching herself away from him.

"You promised me that you'd stay with her! You promised! But you left her all alone for that monster to come and..." The look of pain and anguish on her face increased the guilt Gideon already felt.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left her. But it appears that it was a good thing I did." Gideon watched as Deborah's face changed to show confusion and anger.

"How can you say that? We all know that Lucas wants to hurt Angel. Did he try? Was he interrupted? Who saved her? It seems that if it were left to you, my sister might be dead by now." Deborah's words hit him with the force of punches, the last comment hurting deeply. Before he could respond, Sarah intervened.

"Please, stop this. Demon, don't blame Matt for something that didn't happen. He came to see me because he was so concerned about Angel and wanted to see if there was anything more he could do to help her. And Lucas didn't come to kill Angel, he came to save her."

Gideon watched as Deborah swung round to face Sarah, ready to change the direction of her attack, but she stopped dead at Sarah's final words.

"What do you mean? How did Lucas save her?"

He listened as Sarah told Deborah what she'd told him, about the alien healing device and how Lucas must have used it to give Angel some of his own life force, risking his own health to save her.

Deborah sat down hard on one of the seats in the visiting room, her face freezing into the impassive mask she always used when she wanted to conceal her feelings. Gideon sat beside her and took her hand as she stared at the floor, relieved when she didn't pull away from him. After a silence stretching into minutes, Deborah finally looked up, her face showed her confusion. She looked from him to Sarah and back. "I don't understand. Why would Lucas do that? He must know by now that it was Angel who betrayed him, who was responsible for him being injured and captured. Why would he want to risk his own life to save her?"

Gideon slowly put his arm around his wife and pulled her to his side, feeling her relax as she rested her head on his shoulder. He put his hand to her chin and lifted her face so he could kiss her, then he spoke quietly. "We don't know. Sarah has a theory, but I find it hard to believe."

Deborah looked over at Sarah, who now sat down in one of the chairs opposite. "Matt doesn't agree with me on this, and it's really only a theory, but it does fit the facts. Demon, did you ever wonder why Lucas took Angel with him when he first left Eriadne? He didn't need her really, and in taking her he risked what eventually did happen, that she'd betray him in favor of her sisters. Why did he do that?"

Deborah's face froze again as she said tonelessly. "I assumed at the time that he wanted to break us up, to make sure we could never combine again to put him back in the box."

Sarah leaned forward and smiled gently. "Call me a hopeless romantic, but I wonder if it was more than that? Lucas kept Angel with him even when it didn't serve his best interests. When he came back to Eriadne to kidnap you and Marcus, he could have left her behind on B5, but he didn't. He dragged her along with him. His whole attitude to Angel, including coming here today, doesn't make sense." She paused and looked carefully at Deborah. "Unless you assume one thing. One thing that explains everything."

Deborah frowned and asked, "What thing?" For a moment, Gideon thought his wife almost looked scared, and he wondered why.

Sarah smiled gently again. "I think he loves her. That was what made him take her away with him, what made him keep her by his side, and what made him come here today and save her life, even knowing she betrayed him. To Lucas, Angel is a drug. He's learned how to do without her these past few years, but he couldn't bear to be permanently deprived of her. I know that you all think he's not capable of love, but I can't think of anything else that would explain his actions, can you?"

Deborah exhaled gently, then slowly shook her head. "You may be right, but perhaps not for the reasons you think. When Angel first 'summoned' Lucas..." Gideon kissed her cheek as she

paused and looked at him, her face clearly showing her pain at the memory of that event. It wasn't one of his favorite memories either. Deborah went on, "She used a 'love spell' as the basis of her summoning. It might have been more effective than any of us realized." Gideon couldn't help but look skeptical and she hurried on, "Oh, I know how crazy that sounds, but Angel and Lily could use the knowledge the Vorlon left behind in ways that amazed me. I never understood what they did or how they did it, but it worked. I could help them on occasion, even if I didn't really understand it. Whether you believe it or not, it might be why Lucas can't totally break free of Angel. But I wonder how much of this we should tell her?"

Gideon was definite. "Nothing. Don't tell her anything. Let her believe that Sarah was the one who cured her. She's better off not knowing." He was taken aback when he saw both women shaking their heads. Deborah spoke first.

"I don't think that's right, Matthew. Angel is a grown woman, responsible for her own choices and decisions. We shouldn't deprive her of information that might one day be important to her. We don't have that right."

Sarah agreed. "She needs to know, Matt, but not right now." She stood and walked to the door, stopping as her hand rested on the handle. "This whole day has been exhausting for everyone and you both look as much in need of rest as Angel does. So the doctor is giving her orders." She smiled down at where Gideon sat, his arm still around Deborah. "I want both of you to go back to your house and get some rest. Angel will be asleep for hours yet, but I plan to stay with her anyway. You can come back and see her in the morning, but for now, get out of here. I'm sick of the sight of the pair of you." Her broad smile contradicted her words.

Gideon stood, pulling Deborah to her feet alongside him. "Hear that? We have our orders. Now I'm going to take you back to the house, put you to bed and..." He started to whisper into Deborah's ear exactly what he planned to do next. She relaxed a little as he spoke, then turned to Sarah. "Thank you for everything. Lucas may have cured Angel, but she might not have still been alive for him to cure if it hadn't been for you." She leaned forward and hugged Sarah. "I'll never forget your kindness."

Deborah turned to Gideon and looked deep into his eyes. He could see the love and passion there as clearly as at the moment they were married. "You talk a good talk, Captain. Let's see if you can practice what you preach." She dragged him out of the door, while he followed, telling her to go easy on him, he was getting too old for acrobatics.

Demon walked slowly out of the hospital, her husband's arm around her shoulders, her mind racing. She was fairly sure that she had managed to keep all her terror and inner turmoil hidden, but Matthew was better at reading her than anyone else had ever been, particularly when she was distressed. This was one time when Demon couldn't afford for Matthew to find out what she was thinking and feeling.

When Sarah had told her about the cause of Angel's recovery, Demon had thought she might faint. For Lucas Buck to appear again now, after all this time, was nerve shattering. It had been three years since Demon had encountered him on Ceti Gamma III, and no one else knew about that meeting, not even her sisters. She had never told anyone about what Lucas had said to her then, or about the choices he had given her.

No one else knew of Lucas' desire for an heir, and his need for that heir to be provided by either Angel or Demon. He had told the tall blonde that she could either give her son to him, provide him with another heir herself, or let Angel give him what he needed. None of those alternatives were acceptable to Demon, and she had sworn to kill Lucas before she allowed him to take her sister or her child away from her.

In the years that had passed since, one of the choices Lucas had given Demon had been taken away from her. After the attack by Galen, she was no longer able to bear children. So now only two choices remained. Either Demon would have to give up her son or her sister to the monster she knew Lucas to be. She'd vowed to kill him first.

When Sarah had explained how Lucas had saved Angel, Demon knew what his true motive had been. Let Sarah and Matthew believe that nonsense about love. Lucas could never love anything or anyone but himself. Demon knew he was just keeping his options open. If Angel had died, he would be totally reliant on Demon for an heir. Even assuming Lucas didn't know she could no longer carry his child, it would be like him to want every alternative available to him.

Demon couldn't tell Sarah or Matthew any of this, so she had played along, keeping her face frozen and her mind under tight control. She had allowed them to think she agreed with them, even giving them another reason for thinking that Lucas might love Angel, all the while not resorting to an actual lie. Then she had diverted their attention by raising the issue of how much Angel should be told.

There were only two things Demon was sure of. Lucas had saved Angel for his own selfish reasons, and she would never let him have her sister or her son.

Demon felt her husband's arm tighten around her shoulders, as they reached their ground car in the hospital parking lot. He pulled her around until she faced him, then leaned forward, kissing her gently.

Matthew said softly, "It's going to be all right. Angel will get well, and everything will be fine again."

Demon felt his sincerity and the love behind his words. She just wished she could believe them.

Angel looked over at Sarah as she read her chart. Sarah had arrived a short while ago, to keep Angel company until Demon and Gideon arrived. The time alone with Sarah gave Angel a chance to do something she hadn't done yet.

"Sarah?" Angel smiled at her, suddenly aware that something didn't seem right. Sarah seemed subdued somehow, as if something heavy was weighing on her mind. In fact, thinking back to the previous night when she had woken up, Demon had seemed to be the only one overjoyed at her waking. Both Sarah and Gideon had seemed preoccupied. "Sarah, is everything all right?"

Sarah moved forward in her seat to pat Angel's hand, smiling at her reassuringly. "Of course it is."

Angel watched Sarah's face closely, seeing a flicker of uneasiness in her eyes. "No. There's

something wrong. I'm not as cured as I think, am I? The cure hasn't worked..." The words rushed out of Angel's mouth.

Sarah stood up, then moved to sit on the bed beside Angel. "You're fine, Angel. Of course you're cured. The virus has been completely erased from your system." Sarah paused to strengthen her words with a smile.

Angel suddenly realized she was being silly. Of course she was all right. If she weren't, Sarah would have let her know right away. "I'm sorry, Sarah, I was being a little silly there. Of course I'm cured. I had the..." Before Angel could finish, the door to her room opened and Demon rushed in, hesitating a split second as she saw Angel was awake, before rushing to the bed, where she sat down and took Angel in her arms, hugging her tightly.

Demon's voice was cheerful and excited as she greeted her sister, saying, "Good morning, darling," against her ear.

Angel laughed against her sister's shoulder. "Good morning to you, too." She managed to wave hello to Gideon, who had entered the room and was standing beside Sarah. He waved back, a smile curving his mouth. "Ah Demon? As much as I love this hug, do you think you can let up a little?" Angel's tone was teasing and she laughed softly as Demon quickly let go, sitting back on the bed to look at her sheepishly.

"Sorry. I'm just so happy to see how much better you're looking this morning." Demon lifted a hand to stroke Angel's hair. "How are you feeling?"

Angel breathed in deeply and stretched lazily. "I feel great. Still a little weak, but other than that, never been better. And I have Sarah to thank for that." She turned her attention to Sarah. "I still haven't thanked you for what you did. 'Thank you' seems so inadequate, but at the same time they're the only words in the world that can express how grateful I am." Angel hesitated, vaguely aware of the uncomfortable look that passed from Gideon to Sarah and Sarah to Demon, but she ignored it. When she spoke, her voice was husky with sincerity "Thank you, Sarah. Thank for saving my life."

"Thank you, Angel." There was a long pause then Sarah continued. "But I'm not the one who saved your life."

Angel tilted her head to one side. Frowning, she looked to her sister, as if to confirm or deny what Sarah had just said. "I'm sorry. I don't understand."

Gideon stepped closer as he took over from Sarah. "Sarah did everything she could. She was still working on the cure when you... when you were healed."

Angel looked up at him, her clear blue eyes filled with confusion. "What are you talking about?" When Gideon hesitated, Angel turned to Demon. Their odd behavior was starting to make her feel uneasy. "Demon, what are they talking about? If Sarah didn't save my life, who did? Did another doctor find the cure?"

Demon shook her head and spoke softly "No. A cure wasn't found Angel, but someone did save your life. Through other means."

It didn't escape Angel's notice that Demon had said 'someone' and not 'Doctor'. Again, she saw

the looks passing back and forth. Something was going on. It was almost as if they were afraid. Who *had* saved her life, if they were finding it so difficult to tell her about it? Her breath caught in the back of her throat, as she suddenly knew who it was. She closed her eyes on the wave of emotions that realization brought. Finally, she opened them and looked at her sister. "It wasn't a dream... was it?" She asked, her voice a hoarse whisper.

Demon frowned, "What are you talking about, darling?"

Angel swallowed convulsively, "Lucas. He was here, wasn't he? In this room... It wasn't a dream." She didn't know why she was even asking. She already knew the answer. It was written on their shocked faces.

She watched as Sarah, Gideon and her sister all looked at each other in surprise, as they realized that Angel must have woken long enough to see Lucas in her room. Demon turned to her sister, reaching for her hand. "Yes, Lucas was here." Slowly, hesitantly, Demon began to tell Angel everything, including Sarah's theory as to why Lucas might have wanted to save her.

Angel closed her eyes as Demon finished. She thought back to the previous morning, frowning, as she strained to remember the few moments she had been awake. She remembered Lucas sitting at her bedside and how exhausted he'd looked. Angel suddenly remembered something else she'd noticed. On his right there had been a trolley with something on it, something large that had three large pieces rising out of it with flashing lights. Now she knew what it was. She moved on, trying to recall other details, particularly anything Lucas might have said. But she could only remember one thing. "Hello love, have a nice nap?"

Angel's eyes remained closed, as she thought about their incredible theory of why Lucas had been there. [Lucas saved my life?] She questioned desperately. She couldn't believe that, how could she believe that? It went completely against *everything* she had believed for the past five years, it contradicted everything she believed about Lucas. Why had he risked his life to save her? It didn't make sense! It made sense for someone like Marcus Cole to give up his life to save the woman he loved. Marcus had a heart, he was compassionate, a romantic, capable of love. It was in his nature to give his life for another. But Lucas? It just didn't fit.

But if not for love, then why? When she had last seen him on Ceti Gamma III, Lucas had told her that she'd have to pay for her betrayal one day. Since then, she'd tried to get on with her life, not letting herself be dominated by the fear of what he might do. The last thing she would have expected was this. [Why did he do it?]

A brief hope flared within Angel as she remembered what she had learned about Lucas from Marcus Cole over two years before. Perhaps the man who was the real Lucas had saved her. Perhaps the man had overcome the Rage within, suppressing it with his love for her, for his need for her to live.

[And if wishes were horses, beggars would ride.] Angel couldn't allow herself to believe that Lucas really loved her, that the man behind the Rage could take control and act in defiance of the demon that possessed him. No, if Lucas had done this, it was for his own twisted motives.

Demon called to her sister, aloud, then through her link, then reached out a hand to stroke Angel's forearm. The physical contact brought Angel out of her thoughts with a start, and she looked up, a little dazed. "Are you all right, Angel?" Asked Demon tentatively.

Angel nodded, and forced a smile to her lips. "I'm OK. It's just..." She hesitated, and took a deep breath before she continued, "It's just a shock. It was easier thinking it had been a dream. Knowing for sure that Lucas was here and why he was... It's a little overwhelming." She smiled again, then felt herself taken into her sister's arms. Of all the people there, only Demon would know how this would make Angel feel. Neither Matt nor Sarah knew of Angel's encounter with Lucas three years before, and even Demon knew nothing of Angel's discoveries two years earlier.

"I'm so sorry, Angel. I know it must be difficult for you." Angel nodded and pulled away from the hug, to smile at her sister sadly. "Do you want to talk about it?" For a moment, Angel thought about it, then nodded.

"I wish I could believe that Lucas did it out of love, when I know he never did..." Angel shook her head, the sadness clear on her face. "I can't believe that love is what made him save my life." She paused and let out a shaky, tired breath.

"Angel, are you all right?" Asked Sarah. Angel nodded and even managed a small smile.

Demon reached for her sister's hand. "If you don't want to talk about this now, we can do it later, when you're stronger."

Angel shook her head. "No, I'm fine. I don't want to leave this for later." She needed to give them some sort of explanation they could believe. They must never know about her meeting with Lucas on Ceti Gamma III.

Gideon stepped in to help Angel, as he saw her struggling to find a place to start. "Angel, if you don't think Lucas did it for love, then why?"

Angel sighed, and gave him a grateful smile. "There are a couple of reasons. One, he probably didn't want someone cheating him out of the honor of killing me. I find it hard to believe that Lucas doesn't know by now that I betrayed him, or that he doesn't intend taking his revenge for that. If he's been waiting, it's because he has a reason, a plan, that he'll carry out when he's good and ready." Angel's voice wavered. Once again, she was consumed with the pain of that thought. She was absolutely sure Lucas knew of her betrayal, and that he intended to make her pay for it. He'd told her as much when they'd met. She wished silently that Sarah's theory could have been right. It was so much better than what she knew.

Looking up at the people she cared for and loved, Angel could see the pain Demon felt for her, and Sarah's concern. In Gideon's eyes, she saw knowledge and she realized that he had thought the same thing. [Well he *never* believed that Lucas could love.] Angel sighed, then continued, "Second, I believe that he has something else planned for me. Something that he needs me alive for. I can't even begin to wonder what that could be, but I know I won't like it."

Demon's face froze into immobility, and Sarah shook her head softly, placing a hand gently on Angel's shoulder. "You never know, Angel. You've always told us how unpredictable Lucas is, maybe he *did* do it out of love?"

Angel looked at Sarah, and placed her hand over hers. "Thank you, Sarah, but I don't think so." But, oh god, how she wished that were true. Angel felt her eyes burn with unshed tears, which she refused to let fall. She had cried too much over Lucas in the past, and she wasn't

about to do it again now. In fact, Angel didn't want to talk about this anymore. Taking in a deep calming breath, she straightened up in the bed and squared her shoulders. Angel knew what she was going to say next would be met with resistance, but she wasn't going to have it any other way.

When Angel spoke her voice was strong and determined. "I don't want to talk about this again." She saw Gideon open his mouth to argue, but she lifted a hand to cut him off. "No, you're going to listen to me because I'm too tired to argue with you now. I never want to talk about this again."

"Lucas was here, it confuses me and surprises me that he actually risked his own life to save mine, but I don't want to spend my days going over and over it, in my head or with any of you. So after today, we're not going to discuss this again. We know what happened, but it's never to come up again, understand? It's in the past now and that is where I want it to stay. And I don't want any of you thinking that I'm just trying to deny it, or run away from it. I'm not. I faced the truth about Lucas a long time ago. Yes, I'm shocked at what he did, and I won't lie, I'm happy and grateful. So I'm not trying to hide from anything, I just don't want to be consumed by it. So please..." Angel looked at all three of them for a long moment, before she continued, "Please, do this one thing for me?" She waited for them to agree.

After a long silence, Demon spoke. "If that's what you want, then OK. No more talk about what happened or why," she agreed softly, before hugging her sister gently.

Angel held onto her sister for a moment, then pushed her away gently, so she could look up at Gideon. "Captain, do I have your word?" For an instant, she thought he was going to argue with her, his disapproval of dropping the subject obvious. But when Demon looked at him frowning, he nodded slowly. "Fine, subject closed."

Nodding with satisfaction, Angel turned to Sarah who also agreed. Angel smiled at all of them gratefully. "Thank you. Honestly, it is for the best."

The room fell into an uncomfortable silence for a moment, and then Sarah cleared her throat. "I think we should let Angel get some sleep." Demon's head snapped up and she was about to protest that she didn't think it was a good idea to leave Angel alone, but Angel interrupted her.

"I am feeling rather tired." She laughed softly. "You'd think I would have had enough sleep, but I really could do with a nap right now." It was partly true; she was feeling exhausted again, but mostly she really needed to be alone for a while. [Why? So you can drive yourself crazy thinking about Lucas?] Angel told the little voice in her head to be quiet.

Demon reached across to hug her sister and to kiss Angel on the cheek. Releasing her, Demon stood up and put her arm around Gideon, who had come to stand by her side, watching Angel but saying nothing. "We'll come back later, and if Sarah is agreeable, maybe we can bring you something nice to eat?"

Sarah smiled in agreement. "As long as it's something light. Angel's stomach can't handle anything heavier for a day or so."

Demon looked back at Angel. "How does chicken noodle soup sound?" Demon looked to Sarah, who nodded that the soup was allowable.

"My mouth is watering already." Demon chuckled softly and nodded, then watched as Sarah said goodbye, reminding Angel if she needed anything to just use the call button. Sarah moved around the bed and headed towards the door, where she waited for Demon and Gideon.

For a moment, the same uncomfortable silence returned, as neither Demon nor Gideon made a move. Angel looked at them and smiled, then the silence was broken as Demon spoke to Gideon. "Come on, Matthew. Let's leave Angel to get some sleep."

Gideon turned to leave with Demon. Letting go of her waist as she went through the door, he stopped and turned to face Angel. He opened his mouth to say something, then seemed to change his mind. "Sleep well, Angel." And with that he turned and followed behind Demon and Sarah, who had waited for him just outside the door.

Angel stared at the empty doorway for a moment, perplexed by Gideon's behavior, but decided not to dwell on it. [I'll think about it later.] She sighed as she pushed the button beside her to lower the bed, then lay down, pulling the blankets up. Turning over onto her side, Angel stared out of the large window with heavy eyes.

As tired as she was, thoughts of Lucas and what he had done started to flood in, threatening to overwhelm her. But she refused to let that happen. [I will not think about him. I will not!] Burying her face in her pillow, Angel groaned, then turning on her back, she stared up at the white ceiling. Closing her eyes, she began the relaxation technique she had learned a couple of years ago from one of the Minbari she had worked with on the Excalibur. Focusing her mind only on her breathing, inhaling deeply, then exhaling slowly, with each breath clearing her mind, Angel allowed herself to think only about the sound and feel of each breath.

Within ten minutes, Angel's body was completely relaxed. Her mind empty of all thoughts, she drifted off to sleep.

Angel smiled as she leaned against the rail of the deck, watching the scene before her. It was a beautiful day, even with the early December chill in the California air. The sun was shining, reflecting back up off the ocean. There were people jogging along the shoreline, and surfers paddled out to the break line and waited for the next wave. Angel inhaled deeply, savoring the smell of the ocean. It was so good to be back home, away from the hospital, which reminded her all the time of...

Angel straightened and frowned at herself in annoyance. She was doing it again, about to start thinking about Lucas. Shaking her head she forced herself to think about other things.

That morning, Angel had finally been released from the hospital. Peter, in his usual style, had arranged a small press conference. She had protested, telling him that she wanted her release to be a private affair, and didn't want to answer any questions about her illness and recovery. But he'd insisted, informing her of her responsibility to her fans, who had been flooding his office with cards, letter and flowers. They wanted to hear from her, to see for themselves that she was well. He'd assured Angel that only legitimate news tapers and ISN had been invited to the conference, so she didn't have to worry about the paparazzi. She had relented, albeit reluctantly.

The press conference had gone better than expected. The only uncomfortable moment had been when an ISN reporter had asked Sarah about Angel's recovery and the cure. Sarah told them what they had all agreed upon, that Angel had recovered on her own, without a cure being found. Peter, who'd been informed about what had happened, had stepped in to direct any further questioning about that subject onto something else. After half an hour, he'd called a halt, telling the reporters that Angel needed to get home and get her strength back.

Sarah excused herself from going back to the house with them, as did Peter, who said he had to get back to work on calming the director of Angel's movie. Apparently, he was having a fit about having to carry on shooting around Angel, until she was strong enough to get back to the set and resume filming.

Upon arriving home, Demon and Gideon had tried to convince Angel to take a nap before lunch, but she'd refused. "I've had enough naps to last me a lifetime, thank you. I'm fine, stop fussing." Demon sighed, but gave in, insisting that Angel went outside on the deck and sat quietly, relaxing while she prepared lunch for the three of them, explaining that it would be fun to cook for once. These days, Demon had little time for cooking, spreading herself thinly between writing and looking after her two children. Today, the nanny Matthew and Demon had recently employed was looking after the children, freeing the couple to spend the day with Angel.

For the past couple of hours, Angel had sat out on the deck, wrapped in a warm coat to ward off the slight chill in the air. Gideon had joined her for a while, while Demon was inside, but then he'd looked at the time and told her he had something he needed to do, leaving her to enjoy the day by herself. Movement behind her brought her back to the present, and Angel turned, smiling broadly when she saw Gideon joining her. "You're back already."

"Accomplished what I needed to." The satisfied smile Gideon gave her set alarm bells off in her head. Angel was about to ask him what he'd been up to, when Demon emerged. She moved to stand beside Gideon, who cleared his throat as he turned his gaze, now serious, back to Angel. "We need to talk." His tone was as serious as his expression.

If Angel wasn't sure before, those four words confirmed it. Gideon had been up to something, and it involved her. She moved from the railing, and looked at them suspiciously. "Why is it whenever someone says that to me," she paused to point at both of them before she continued, "especially when they look like the two of you do right now, I begin to worry?"

"No! Absolutely not!" Angel crossed her arms in front of her and shook her head, her jaw set with determination.

Matthew growled in frustration and Demon could tell he was trying to resist the urge to shake some sense into her sister. Demon moved between him and Angel. Things were getting a little heated, and the last thing she wanted was this turning into another one of their fights.

"Angel, be reasonable. Matthew is right about this, and if you'd just take a moment to think about it before refusing, you'd see that."

Angel shook her head again. "No way! And don't tell me to be reasonable. If I agreed to this, I

would have no privacy at all. I have little enough as it is, with the paparazzi always sticking their noses into my life. I wouldn't have any if I agreed." Angel paused, then shook her head again. "No! I won't agree to this!"

Matthew moved around Demon, who reached out to touch his arm. Demon could feel his annoyance and anger and she knew that he was about to blow. If she didn't do something to calm the situation down, Matthew would lose his temper, Angel would retaliate and then just out of spite, she would never agree.

Gideon felt a wave of serenity and calm wash over him, dissipating the rush of irritation and anger that was building steadily, thanks to Angel's impossible mule-headedness. For a moment he was annoyed, and was about to tell Deborah to stop sending, but he stopped himself as he realized that she was only doing it to calm the situation down. Taking a deep breath, he smiled at her, thanking her silently. Then he turned his attention back to Angel. This time when Gideon spoke, his voice was soft and rational. "Look, Angel. I understand that your privacy is important to you, but so is your safety. After what just happened to you... Surely you can see that this is a good idea?"

Angel didn't say anything as she thought about it for a moment. "But it's not necessary. The stalker was caught. He's going to be spending a long time in jail. He's no longer a threat to me. I don't need a bodyguard."

Gideon threw up his hands and turned to Deborah. "I give up! You see if you have better luck getting through that thick skull of hers." Angel scowled at Gideon as he sat down on the arm of a chair and glared at her.

Deborah sighed and moved closer to Angel. "What you say may be true, Angel, but you never know when another lunatic might fixate on you and become a danger. Being the celebrity you are, you're always out in the open. You need protection, and the bodyguard Matthew has found is one of the best. He won't invade your privacy. Matthew spoke to many of the people he has worked for and they all highly recommend him for his tact and unobtrusiveness. They say that he's always protected them, but never intruded on their lives." Deborah stopped as she saw Angel's eyes fill with doubt. Taking Angel's hand, she led her over to the couch and got her to sit.

Deborah tried another tactic. "Please, Angel. If not for yourself, then do it for us? I nearly lost you. I don't ever want to come that close again. Look, just try him out for a month. If you still feel the same way after that, then you can let him go." Gideon was about to open his mouth but closed it again when his wife shot him a warning look. She could obviously sense his disapproval, but ignored it, as she focused back on Angel. "Just give it a try. Please. It's for your own safety."

Angel sat still for a moment, as Deborah looked at her beseechingly. She looked across at Gideon who just continued glaring at her. Standing up, Angel moved over to the window and gazed out, silently thinking over what her sister had said.

Gideon watched her, then looked at his wife. The minutes ticked by slowly, and Gideon felt his irritation rising. [Damn stubborn girl!] He was about to give Angel a piece of his mind when

he saw her turn around.

"OK. I'll do it." Deborah and Gideon both stood, their faces beaming. Angel held up a hand to stop them. "But only for a week. I'll try this out for one week, and not a day longer. If I hate it and feel my privacy has been taken away, he goes."

Deborah rushed over to her sister and hugged her. "That's all I ask, for you to give it a chance. I promise you, you'll be surprised at how unobtrusive he'll be."

Angel laughed softly against her sister's shoulder then pushed her away. "I'll believe it when I see it." She smiled gently at her sister, then walked back over to the couch and sat down again. Deborah joined her, while Gideon remained standing, watching her, still frowning.

Angel rolled her eyes at him and smiled. "Oh, stop frowning, Captain and tell me more about this bodyguard. I'd like to know a little about the man who is going to be protecting me."

Gideon gave a small snort and chuckled as he sat in the chair opposite the couch. "After all these years, you can still wind me up like no one else can." He softened his words with a grin.

"You don't expect that to change, do you?"

Gideon laughed and shook his head. "That would be expecting too much."

Angel grinned at him, then became serious again. "OK, so tell me about him. I don't even know his name."

"Michael Healy."

Angel's eyes flashed with mild recognition. "Healy? That name sounds familiar?"

Gideon nodded. "It should. Do you remember Sergeant Healy from the Excalibur?" Angel nodded. Gideon continued. "Well, Michael is his brother. I remembered the Sergeant mentioning a younger brother and that he was a bodyguard with an interplanetary security corporation that specializes in this kind of work. I got in contact with my old Sergeant in Florida, where he's retired now, and he arranged for me to meet Michael. I checked and he comes highly recommended."

Angel digested this bit of information before asking. "OK, so I take it that you've met him? What's he like as a person?"

"I like him. He has a sharp mind. Pleasant, friendly, and when you meet him you'll see why he makes a good bodyguard. Trust me, Angel, you'll like him. He has one of those personalities that everyone can get along with and a good sense of humor as well."

"Matthew's right." Deborah spoke softly. Angel's head snapped up and she looked at her sister in surprise.

"You've met him?"

Deborah nodded. "Of course. I wasn't going to entrust my sister's safety to someone I didn't approve of first."

Gideon reached out to stroke his wife's hair. "You should have seen her give him the third degree."

She laughed. "Don't exaggerate, Matthew. I simply asked him a few questions."

Gideon snorted loudly. "Yeah, a few hundred..." Deborah picked up a pillow from behind her and threw it. Gideon managed to catch it before it hit him in the face and threw it back at her. Deborah ducked just in time to have the pillow hit the wall behind her with a soft thud and fall behind the couch.

Angel laughed at their sudden playfulness. "OK you two, quit it, before you break something." Both of them quickly sat back in their respective seats and looked as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Angel shook her head in amusement. "Good children. Now when do I get to meet this Michael Healy?"

Gideon stood up and gave her a smile. "I'll go and get him." He moved towards the door but was stopped by Angel's disbelieving voice.

"He's been outside all this time?"

Gideon nodded. "Yes. I asked him to come with me and wait down by the pier while we talked to you."

Angel couldn't believe what she was hearing. "And what if I'd said 'no'?"

Gideon smiled at her broadly. "We'd have worked on you until you said 'yes'." He turned and opened the door, hesitating for a moment. "We'll be back in a few minutes." And with that he disappeared through the door as he shut it behind him.

Demon sat for a moment and watched Angel, as she stared at the door in disbelief, then chuckled. "You should see your face."

Angel turned to Demon. "I can't believe you two...." She narrowed her eyes at her sister. "I didn't stand a chance, did I?" Demon pursed her lips and shook her head, grinning. Angel rolled her eyes but couldn't be annoyed with her. Deep down she knew her sister and Gideon were right about this.

Sighing softly, Angel took a quick look at the clock on the wall and realized that she had a few minutes before Gideon and Michael arrived. Now was a good time to ask Demon more about what she suspected was part of the reason for their insistence that she should get a bodyguard. She didn't want to ask Gideon, because she didn't want to have to handle the mood that this particular subject always produced in him. Turning back to Demon, she cleared her throat. "There's something I want to ask you before they get here."

Demon frowned with curiosity and nodded. "Of course. What is it?"

"The reason why you and Matt want me to get a bodyguard. It's not just the fear of another crazed fan, is it?" Asked Angel softly, aware that she was actually nervous of the answer for some reason.

Demon's eyes widened in surprise. "No, Angel, it's not."

Angel's jaw clenched, then relaxed, as she sighed and turned to stare at the delicate crystal unicorn on the coffee table in front of her. It was the one that Marcus Cole had sent her, years before. "Lucas. You want me to have a bodyguard in case Lucas returns."

Demon shifted in her seat, then reached out to touch her sister's arm. "Yes. Look, I know that you don't want to talk about him, and I won't again, but Angel, he managed to get to you so easily, because you were unprotected. Even if this time he actually saved your life, we're all agreed that next time he shows up it may not have such a happy outcome. And when he does come, we want to be sure he'll find it less easy to get to you, because you'll have someone protecting you, someone who'll be prepared for Lucas."

Angel had been listening calmly to what her sister was saying, and even felt some relief, until Demon's last words. "Prepared? You and Matt... you've told Mr. Healy about Lucas, haven't you?" The thought made her go cold. She didn't want people knowing about her past with Lucas, about the bad things that she'd done and what had happened. The only other person who knew all about it was Peter, but that was only so he could be ready to handle the public relations problems, if it ever got out.

Demon reached for her sister's hand, and held it tightly. "Don't panic, Angel. We told Michael just enough about Lucas for him to know what a threat he is to you. We didn't tell him anything about..."

She stumbled to a stop, but Angel finished for her. "You didn't tell him anything about Eriadne, Dureena or the baby?" She asked, her voice shaky.

Demon shook her head and smiled gently at her sister. "No. We just said that Lucas was an old boyfriend, who was very dangerous and had never been able to let go. Michael has seen these things before, so he understands. We had to make him aware of Lucas, so he knew what to prepare for, can you understand that?"

She watched as Angel sat thinking, finally nodding. "Yes, but you really should have told me that, right from the beginning. Maybe I wouldn't have been so resistant to the idea of a bodyguard."

Demon laughed and shook her head. "Yes, you would."

Angel started to smile. Demon was right. Even if it meant being protected from Lucas, she still wasn't crazy about having her privacy invaded by a stranger. The tension that had filled the room at the mention of Lucas faded. She decided not to voice her belief that if Lucas really wanted to get to her, no bodyguard, however good, would stop him. She didn't want the atmosphere to be unpleasant when she met Michael Healy, so she directed the conversation back to him. "So this Michael Healy, do you like him?"

Demon smiled, and again wondered if she should tell her sister more about Michael. She watched Angel for a moment and thought about the man that her sister was going to meet. Michael Healy was at least 190 centimeters tall. He had thick hair that at one time would have been completely sandy brown, but was now colored by gray. He had deep set, warm, dark

brown eyes and a voice that could melt a woman's heart with its rich, deep tones. One could only describe Michael Healy as embodiment of gorgeous. Demon had a feeling that once Angel saw him, she wouldn't mind having him around so much after all.

Demon smiled mischievously and couldn't resist her next comment. "Oh, I wouldn't mind having him guard my body." Indeed she wouldn't, if Matthew weren't the only man for her, her lifelong love. Before Angel could turn around, Demon put on her best poker expression.

Angel had obviously heard the mischievous note in her sister's voice and her head snapped around, but when she looked at Demon, her sister's face gave nothing away. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, you'll see." This time, Demon didn't hide the smile from her sister.

"This is Jennifer Billings for ISN Entertainment News, dateline 15th January 2275. Earlier today, in total privacy and seclusion, we can exclusively reveal that actress Angelique Denier, heavily tipped for an Oscar nomination this year, was married to her former bodyguard, Michael Healy. The marriage took place in the English country house belonging to Ms. Denier's sister, award-winning novelist Deborah Montgomery. As one would expect, the security surrounding the wedding was strict, and it's rumored that this was organized by Ms. Montgomery's husband, retired Captain Matthew Gideon, the galactic hero who found the cure for the Drakh plague.

"Although no press cameras were allowed at the wedding, we have been able to obtain a hologram of the happy couple, taken by one of the few privileged guests..."

"Off." The word was spoken quietly, but the emotion behind that single word was overwhelming. It was followed by a long pause, then a half full bottle of wine soared across the room, smashing the viewscreen into a thousand pieces and sending sparks flying in every direction. The contents of the bottle quickly doused the small fire that began to burn in the wreckage.

Lucas stood, staring at the place where his viewscreen had been, breathing heavily. He couldn't remember when he'd last felt so angry. His usual iron control over the Rage that lived within him and drove so many of his actions had slipped, resulting in the damage in front of him. He smiled bitterly, as he reined back on his anger, pushing it down into the deep, dark hole in his center where it lived and thrived. "And that's a damned good bottle of red wine you've cost me, Angel-Face."

He closed his eyes as he took a deep breath, completing the task of locking himself back under control. Lucas turned to look at the picture of Angel that hung on his wall. It showed her in the role for which she's been nominated for the Oscar, sitting on a beach in a tiny white bikini, the wind blowing her hair as she sat looking directly into the camera. The look in her eyes reminded him of how she'd looked up at him so often, full of trust and love. Lucas knew it was faked, just an act, but as he didn't have any pictures of her from the time they'd spent together, this was the nearest he could get.

He looked long and hard at the picture, shaking his head as he whispered, "I didn't save you

for someone else, Angel. You still belong to me. Body and soul--that was the deal. And if you think I'm gonna let a Healy have you..." He laughed bitterly. Angel couldn't have picked a man with a worse name, as far as Lucas was concerned.

Lucas reached out and drew his finger along the picture, touching the line of Angel's cheekbone, down her throat and over her breasts, knowing that one day soon he'd do this for real, not just to a picture. "This marriage ain't gonna last, Angel. I'll make damned sure of that."

"This is Kevin Johnson for ISN News, dateline 5th June 2275. In Washington DC today, friends and family of the Oscar winning actress Angelique Denier attended the funeral of her husband, Michael Healy. Mr. Healy was killed six days ago, by a sniper attempting to murder Earth Senator James Redway. Senator Redway employed Mr. Healy as a bodyguard after he had received a number of death threats. Police investigating the murder are still hunting the killer, and have made statements saying that they are making progress. No further details have been made available. In gratitude for Healy having given his own life to save that of an Earth Senator, the government of North America granted the rare privilege of a formal burial at Arlington cemetery.

"Ms. Denier, who had been married to Healy for less than five months, was accompanied by her family, including her brothers-in-law, retired Captain Matthew Gideon, responsible for finding the cure to the Drakh plague, and Captain John Matheson, currently commanding the ISA flagship, Excalibur, and the first telepath to be promoted to that rank within Earthforce. Captain Matheson and his wife were vacationing on Earth at the time of the murder and have stayed with Ms. Denier at all times since.

"This footage, taken secretly, shows Ms. Denier being supported by Captain Gideon's wife, Deborah Montgomery..."

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four W

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