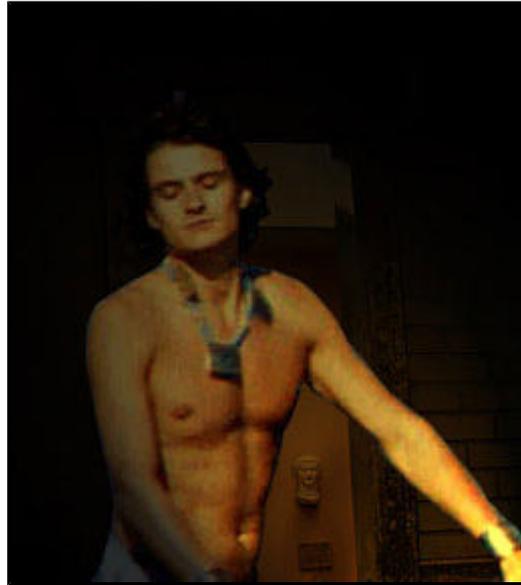


The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four W - Part 2: Three Men and a Snake

by The Space Witches



A slave called Troy.

Chapter 1

31st January 2275

Angel

I looked up and smiled as my sister twitched anxiously at the curtains yet again, peering out into the gathering dusk of a cold, wet, winter's afternoon. It was only just turned 3:00, but it was already getting dark outside, as much from the low clouds that had been spitting rain down on us all day as from the encroaching night. My sister and I were spending a quiet afternoon together, while our men were out walking, and my niece was having her afternoon nap.

"Stop fretting, Demon. I'm sure they'll be back soon, and they're not stupid, you know. They have enough sense to get in from out of the rain."

My tall older sister snorted, but came to join me on the sofa in the living room of her old English house. She and Matthew had restored it to its former grandeur and the room was now cozy despite its size, with a fire blazing in the grate, and soft lights creating an ambient glow of warmth. I snuggled down deeper into the soft cushions of the sofa, watching as Demon curled her long legs under her and sat.

"Michael and Marcus do, but I sometimes wonder about Matthew." Her expression changed

from its usual cool, impassive gaze to a warm smile as she spoke her husband's name. Matt was one of the few people who could melt my ice queen sister's frozen demeanor. She went on, "I sometimes think all those years living on starships has made him forget about such mundane things as weather. Particularly English winter weather. He just throws on that Driza-Bone coat of his, and he thinks it will protect him from the elements. At least Michael had the sense to put on a cap, and I know Marcus will pull his hood up, but Matthew will just march on regardless, getting his hair soaked, then he'll catch a cold and guess who'll have to take care of him?"

I laughed at Demon's querulous tone, knowing that behind it lay a deep and abiding love for her husband. Something I now understood more than I ever had before.



"So why won't Matt wear a cap or a hat? It's certainly cold enough out there." I nodded toward the window against which the winter rain lashed, making me shiver despite the warmth of the room. That shiver probably came from the contrast with the weather I'd experienced for the previous two weeks.

After our wedding--do you have any idea how much I love those words? 'Our wedding.' 'When we got married.' 'My husband.' Every sentence I spoke seemed to include those words and I loved it. Anyway, after our wedding in Matt and Demon's house,

Michael and I had fled the English snow and spent our honeymoon at my sister and brother-in-law's villa on the island of Malta. The warmth of the Mediterranean winter had been a wonderful contrast to the cold of Cornwall, and Michael and I had spent two blissfully happy weeks, away from the glare of publicity, hidden from the paparazzi, making love day and night, indoors and outdoors, exploring each other, body and soul. Our brief courtship and whirlwind marriage meant we still had a lot to learn about each other but believe me when I say that I've never enjoyed my lessons so much.

Demon chuckled in response to my question, and then said, "You can't ever tell him I told you this, but Matthew thinks hats make his ears look big."

I fell about laughing, and when I finally caught my breath, I coughed, "Now don't get me wrong, Demon. I love Matt, and I think he's the second most handsome man in the galaxy, but his ears *are* big, hat or no hat."

Demon chuckled again. "I know they are, but I love his ears. They give me something to hang onto." She gave me a wicked look, and I cracked up again. When I calmed down a little, my big sister leaned forward, then reached out her hand to touch my chin, lifting it so she could look closely at my face. Whatever she could see there made her smile, and she said, "Marriage suits you, Angel. I don't think I've ever seen you look so happy. Tired, but happy."

I swatted her hand away and grinned. "Too much bed and not enough sleep, that's the problem. That bed in the master bedroom of your villa is wonderful. We never wanted to get out of it."

Demon laughed. "Given the circumstances, you probably wouldn't have wanted to get out of it

even if it had been a bed of nails, but I'm glad you enjoyed yourselves. I hope you can stay with us for a little while now. You don't have to go back to California just yet, do you?" She gave a wheedling grin, and I laughed again, reaching out to hug her.

"We can stay a few days, if you're sure it's no trouble."

I loved my sister's house in England, and always enjoyed my visits. It was old and rambling, but beautifully restored and very comfortable. Its setting was terribly romantic, on a low cliff on the north coast of Cornwall, overlooking the sea. I loved being lulled to sleep by the noise of the waves crashing against the shore. It was even better now I could look forward to curling up in the arms of my husband, listening to those waves. See? There I go again. 'My husband.'

Demon blew a very loud and inelegant raspberry, and said, "Marcus would never forgive me if I let you both go so soon. Michael is fast becoming his favorite uncle."

My husband--OK, I'll stop soon, I promise. Maybe. Or maybe not. My husband had quickly formed a bond with my favorite nephew. Michael loved children; it was one of the many traits that had made me fall in love with him. He and Marcus had got off to a slightly shaky start, as my nephew had been more than a little jealous at first. Marcus and I had been close since he was a baby and I think he resented another man taking my attention away from him. These things aren't easy to understand when you're five going on six, as Marcus was then.

Michael had finally won Marcus over on the day after our wedding. (I can't help it, OK? The words just come out.) Michael had risen early--heaven knows where he found the energy after what we'd been up to in the guest bedroom all night!--and he had gone down to the kitchen to make me breakfast, which he'd planned to bring back to me in bed. Instead, he'd found Marcus sitting on the steps leading from the back of the house to the garden, sulking.

Michael told me later that he had sat next to Marcus for a while in silence, then leaned against him and nudged him. Marcus looked up, maintaining the silence, and nudged back. So Michael had nudged him again, harder this time. It had soon developed into a wrestling match, with Marcus finally sitting astride Michael's chest, rubbing snow into his face, laughing fit to burst.

At this point, my sister had appeared in the French windows, rubbing sleep from her eyes--Demon isn't a morning person--telling them they were as bad as each other, and if they didn't keep the noise down they'd wake the whole house. It was too late, of course. Their noise had woken Mattie, who was just approaching her first birthday, and my niece's cries had soon woken everyone else who had stayed over after the wedding. I never did get my breakfast in bed, but coming down the stairs to find my new husband and my favorite nephew sitting next to each other at the breakfast table, chatting away to each other like old friends, had more than made up for it.

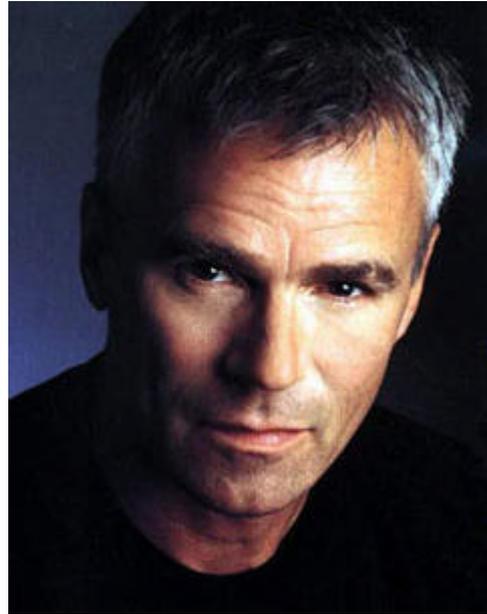
All these memories rushed through my head in the few seconds after I had accepted my sister's invitation to stay, and while she hugged me with glee. We broke apart at the sound of the living room door opening, as the men finally returned from their afternoon walk on the beach.

Demon had been right, Matt had refused to wear a hat and his hair was soaking wet. Marcus pushed back his hood, showing that his cheeks were glowing pink from the cold. His grin spread from ear to ear, as he rushed across the room toward me, yelling, "Look what we

found, Auntie Angel!"

While Demon went to get a towel for Matt and the two men removed their outer clothes, Marcus presented me with a dirty, green bottle. He told me breathlessly that it was carved from a single emerald, and was probably from a pirate's treasure trove. "Uncle Michael says he's going to help me find the rest of the treasure when it stops raining."

I looked up at my husband, who had now removed his cap, allowing his hair to spring up into its usual spiky crown. Nothing could make Michael's hair lie flat. Not that I'd ever wanted it to. I loved his hair just as it was. He smiled down at me and my heart melted. Somehow, when Michael smiled, his eyes smiled, too. He had the most expressive eyes of anyone I'd ever known, and the expression in them at that moment was one I had finally learned to accept. Love. Pure, unadulterated love. Michael loved me as no one had ever loved me before.



As I looked up into the warmest brown eyes in the galaxy, one word rang in head, over and over.

Mine.

Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine.

Not stolen, as the brief moments of passion and love I'd shared with Matt had been. Not loaned to me, as Lily had once loaned me Luke to help me in my pain. Not snatched in the night, as the short hours I had spent with the fictional but all too real Captain Hunt had been. And I was not owned, as Lucas Buck had once owned me, treating me like a possession, albeit a precious one.

Michael belonged to me and to me alone. He was mine, and I was his. We shared our possession of each other, and he had given me my happy ever after.

Our eyes met over Marcus' head and we didn't have to speak, or to interrupt my nephew's excited chatter. We just looked at each other and we knew. This was real and this was forever.

I came back to the present to find that Marcus was still babbling about pirate's treasure, and Demon was quietly scolding Matthew, as she tried to rub his hair dry with a towel. Matt soon shut her up with a kiss, and they came to join us by the sofa.

Snuggling himself down into the cushions next to me, my husband put his arm around my shoulder and nuzzled my ear, whispering, "I don't need to go digging for treasure. I have all the treasure I need right here."

Gideon

I sat on one of the sofas in the living room, with my arm around my wife next to me, looking across the room at my sister-in-law and her new husband. Yes, husband. The word stuck in my throat, and I had to fight my jealousy every minute, for fear that Deborah would pick up on the emotion. While my wife's empathic powers had been considerably diminished, first by the withdrawal of the Vorlon she carried inside her and second by Galen's attack, she could still detect strong feelings.

Well, no one could ever say my feelings toward Angel had been neutral. From the moment we met, Angel had infuriated me, intrigued me, attracted me, enticed me and frustrated me. Nope, no neutrality there, Matt. Better try harder.

The problem was that I had never seen Angel look so beautiful and so happy. She sat on the sofa, her legs curled up under her, with Michael's long arm draped around her shoulders, and she was almost purring. Angel had always possessed a lot of feline qualities and at that moment, she looked like a cat that had got the cream. My jealousy arose from that cream being called Michael Healy, not Matthew Gideon.

Don't get me wrong, there was nothing wrong with Michael. I was learning to like the man Angel had married, even though I'd thought their wedding overly hasty. Why couldn't they have just lived together for a while? Or even better, they could have lived apart, and then I could have helped Angel out with any frustrations she might have been feeling.

Just pretend I didn't think that, OK? Thoughts like that brought my self-loathing to new heights and I once again had to suppress my feelings. I'd hate to have to explain the source of my discontent to Deborah.

I made a strenuous effort to push all those notions and emotions down into a deep hidden part of my consciousness, the part even I don't want to delve into, and I leaned forward to pour myself another generous measure of single malt whisky. I heard Deborah's slight intake of breath and I knew she disapproved. OK, so I was drinking a little more heavily than I had when we'd lived aboard the Excalibur, but so what? I didn't have the responsibilities I'd had then. Being a full time father didn't require me to maintain the same level of alertness as being a starship Captain. Who cared if I sometimes woke up with a headache?



Well, Deborah cared, but only when she was home.

I was almost grateful to Michael Healy for having swept Angel off her feet and married her, as the preoccupation with the wedding and the happy couple then visiting us for a few days had forced Deborah to cancel most of her public engagements and stay home for a few weeks. I liked having her home. I liked having her with me in our bed every night, even if we didn't make love quite as often as we once had. For a moment, I wondered why that had happened, then shook my head and refocused my attention on the couple opposite.

As I said, I was learning to like Michael Healy, who shared a lot of qualities in common with his older brother, Ben; qualities such as stability, reliability and a very dry sense of humor. Sergeant Ben Healy had served with me for many years, and had recommended his younger brother when we'd been looking for a bodyguard for Angel. I just hadn't expected Michael to

take his body guarding duties quite so seriously. The way he was stroking Angel's shoulder and kissing her hair made it clear that he considered taking care of her body as his prime responsibility.

I gritted my teeth and took another pull at the scotch, barely listening to the conversation going on between my wife, Angel and Michael, wondering why I was feeling so disgruntled. I had everything a man could ask for. A gorgeous, successful wife who I loved, two beautiful children I adored, (both of whom were sleeping peacefully upstairs at that time of the evening,) a wonderful home and as much wealth as we were ever likely to need. So why was I feeling so grouchy?

The answer was obvious. I was jealous. Jealous of the man sitting opposite me, who had made Angel happy at last, when all I had ever given her was heartache. I wanted to be the one who gave Angel happiness, and I was pissed because someone else had done it. And before you say anything, I am well aware of just how much of a jerk that makes me.

So sit down, pour yourself a drink, and join the club of people who think Matt Gideon is a selfish bastard. I'd welcome the company.

I was working up nicely toward a state of half-drunken, maudlin self-pity when the doorbell rang. I hadn't heard a vehicle in the drive, but the wind was blowing hard, and the rain hammering against the windows, so that wasn't entirely surprising. What *was* surprising was having unexpected visitors at that time of the evening. Our house is somewhat off the beaten track, so we don't get people dropping by who are 'just passing'.

"Expecting anyone?" I looked at my wife, wondering if she'd invited some of her new literary friends, and forgotten to tell me. Stupid, Matt. You should know better than that. Deborah rarely forgets anything.

Deborah shook her head, so I stood abruptly, wobbling a little as the scotch hit my knees. I said, "I'll go see who it is," and made an effort to walk straight as I left the room. It *was* an effort, and I decided that maybe I should cut back on the drinking a little after all.

The doorbell rang again as I approached the door, and I muttered under my breath, "Hold your horses, I'm coming."

As I reached the door I activated the viewscreen in the wall to one side, and looked out into the bleak night. The outside light had come on automatically when the visitor approached the house, and now illuminated our uninvited guest. I groaned quietly to myself, then pulled the door open.

"Well, well. Marcus Cole. What brings you to this part of the galaxy?"

Angel

When we had all settled down again after the surprise of Matt bringing Marcus Cole into the room, I had to explain to my new husband that my nephew Marcus' name had nothing to do with the visiting Ranger. It was actually a product of my sister's somewhat warped sense of humor. Having a Matthew, a Luke and a John in the family, she had thought it amusing to

add a Mark, but she'd decided that Mark Gideon sounded a little harsh, so she'd softened the name to Marcus.

This had all taken place long before we met Marcus Cole. Well, 'met' isn't quite the right word. 'Revived' might be more appropriate, although I suppose that 'resurrected' would be most accurate. Whichever, my sisters and I had rescued Marcus from cryonic suspension where he had been placed after he had died. Yes, you heard me right. Died. It's complicated, OK?

Explaining all this in whispers to Michael, as Marcus settled himself in the wing chair by the fire, took a little time, so I wasn't really listening when Marcus explained the reason for his visit. I was concentrating more on the look of total disbelief in Michael's eyes when I told him that Demon, Lily and I had brought Marcus back to life. I whispered hurriedly, "Never mind! I'll explain it all later," and turned my attention back to the rest of the room.

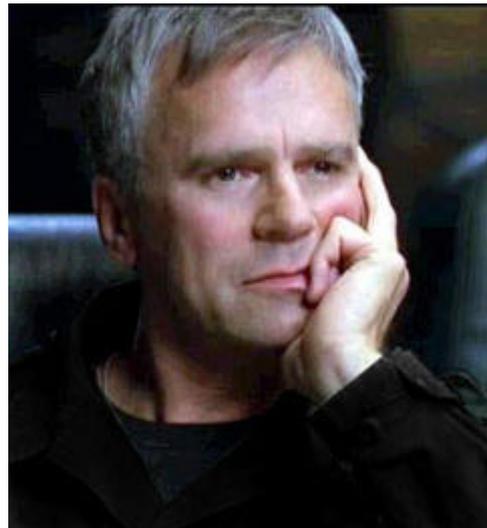
Michael had looked a little surprised when I had flung myself into Marcus' arms on his arrival. Well, I suppose it's not the behavior a man expects of his newlywed wife. That was something else I'd have to explain to Michael later. I'd have to try to get him to understand that I truly loved Marcus Cole, but in the same way as I loved my nephew Marcus. Deep abiding affection and caring for his wellbeing, with absolutely no sense of attraction. Marcus Cole was a handsome man, but he belonged completely--body, soul and spirit--to another woman. And he did prattle on like a babbling brook, a habit that on occasion could make me want to kill him within five minutes of saying hello.

I tuned back into the conversation just as Marcus said the other woman's name.

"So Susan is busy getting briefed on her new posting, and I was at a loose end for a couple of days, so I thought I'd just pop by and catch up with all the news." He looked over at me and smiled fondly, saying, "Angel's news seemed rather exciting, so I decided it might be a good time to meet the man who has been lucky enough to win her heart." His benevolent gaze shifted from me to Michael, and his smile turned into a grin.

Michael laughed aloud and hugged me closer to him as he said, "Damn right I'm lucky, and I'm going to hold onto that heart--and the rest of her, too--until the day I die."

A wave of warmth ran through my body as I gazed up at my husband. I looked into his eyes and saw he meant every word. He loved me in the way I had only dreamed of being loved for so many years. Sitting there with his arms wrapped around me, secure in the totality of his devotion, was one of the happiest moments of my life.



Marcus chuckled and asked, "So tell me all about the wedding. I'm really rather annoyed that Earthforce didn't send Susan's orders a couple of weeks earlier. If I'd got here sooner I could have joined in the bachelor party." He looked from Michael to Matthew and back. "What did you get up to? Or maybe you should tell me after the ladies have retired."

Marcus sometimes had a delightfully old-fashioned approach to women. How he kept it when married to a newly promoted Earthforce General was a mystery I never solved. If he'd talked like that around General Ivanova I suspect he'd have been court-martialed at least, and at worst, had his Denn'bok inserted somewhere painful.

Matt looked across at Michael and Michael looked back at Matt. They both looked sheepish and Matt finally said, "Things got a little rushed. We didn't quite get around to arranging a night out."

Marcus looked surprised and somewhat annoyed. "What? After everything you said to me when Susan and I got married?" He glared at Matt and wagged his finger. "You and Ben Marriot were insistent that I should have a proper bachelor night out, and it's a night I'm not likely to forget. You two took me to parts of Babylon 5 I didn't know existed. I still have a scar from that night, and Susan *still* doesn't believe my story about how I got it!"

This was fascinating stuff! I'd never heard about this event, and looking across at Demon, I could see that she was no wiser than me. Just how had Matt managed to arrange a bachelor party for Marcus without either of us finding out? I almost felt sorry for Matt, as I suspected he was in for a night of interrogation from my sister that he'd never forget. If he had any sense he'd confess quickly.

Matt was frantically trying to quiet Marcus, but that never works. Once Marcus gets started on a subject, he's impossible to shut up. Well, unless you happen to have a piece of two by four close to hand. The Ranger was hell bent on telling Michael all the gory details of the stag night Matt and Ben Marriot had arranged for him, and nothing Matt could do or say was going to stop him.

By the time Marcus got to the part involving the stripper, the Drazi and the trained monkey, Michael and I were doubled over with laughter, Matt was red-faced with embarrassment, and Demon was chuckling, while shaking her head at Matt and giving him a look that promised retribution later.

"And of course, there's no word for 'discretion' in the Drazi language, so you can imagine the result!" Marcus finished his story with a flourish, and I thought for a moment I might suffocate. I was laughing so hard I couldn't catch my breath, and Michael was no better off.

Demon brought us both drinks to help us collect ourselves, then went to sit down next to Matt again, whispering something in his ear. Whatever it was made his face turn even redder. I think at that moment Matt could cheerfully have strangled Marcus. It was a reaction he provoked in a lot of people.

"I think a bachelor party for Michael is required immediately. In fact, I think we should hold it tomorrow night. Now where shall we go?" Marcus beamed a quizzical smile as he looked from one man to the other and back.

Gideon

I should have taken a PPG to the front door with me. Then I could have shot Marcus Cole, hidden the body and pretended to the others that it was just the wind and rain that had

activated the doorbell. I'm almost sure I could have gotten away with it. Of course, being interrogated by Susan Ivanova about her husband's disappearance would have been unpleasant, but nothing compared to what my wife was going to put me through later. Don't ask me how I had managed to keep the night of Marcus' bachelor party a secret from her, as I'm not telling. I may need to use that ploy again someday.

To my utter amazement, Deborah said softly, "I think that's an excellent idea." She turned to me and smiled. I know that smile all too well. It's the dangerous one that means she's planning something, and I may or may not like the result. She went on, "You and Michael and Marcus can have a boy's night out, while Angel and I celebrate in our own way."

Oh shit, now I was really in trouble! Deborah's celebrating was likely to prove both expensive and uncomfortable for me, I was sure. I could only hope that the celebrations didn't involve Brevari. My oh-so-innocent-looking wife continued, "I can ask the nanny to baby-sit for the night. It's a pity Lily isn't around to join us..."

It wasn't a pity at all; it was a godsend. The idea of the three of them out on the town together was terrifying. The town probably wouldn't survive. If Ilas, Dureena and Sarah had been around, too, I don't think the *planet* would have survived! The thought made me shudder. I've gotten a little protective about old Earth, having saved it just a while before.

"...but I'm sure we can have fun anyway." Deborah turned to Marcus and asked, "Might Susan be free to join us?"



I think that was the moment when Marcus realized he might have gone too far. The idea of his wife and mine, along with Angel, celebrating together, clearly terrified him. Marcus isn't as dumb as he sometimes sounds. His smile turned into a fixed grin of terror as he shook his head vehemently.

"Oh no, she's *much* too busy at Earthforce HQ. Absolutely no way to interrupt her, I'm afraid."

Maybe the town might survive after all. Maybe we could talk them out of this idea. The moment of hope flared and died as Marcus turned his attention back to me, and proved that he *can* be as dumb as he sometimes sounds by pressing on, "You know all the best clubs, Matt. Can we go somewhere I can improve my poker? I didn't do too well in that last hand on B5, but I've been reading up on the game, and I'm sure I can do better now."

The memory of the poker game that had been the crowning glory of Marcus' stag night was one I had often tried to suppress. The only good thing about it was that the Drazi had won the trained monkey back off him. I'd have hated explaining to Susan Ivanova just what that monkey had been trained to do.

I shook my head and tried to distract him. "It's been a long time since I played, Marcus. I'm not sure I know of any places in England anyway."

It was a nice try, but I knew it was hopeless when Deborah gave a snort of derision. "So where did you and Ben Marriot go when he came to visit last October?"

I was trapped by my wife's near eidetic memory. I struggled to escape the trap one last time. "Oh, some place that Ben knew. I'm not sure I remember..." I ran out of words as I saw the expression on Deborah's face. It was useless. I was like an animal gnawing on its own leg to free itself. She always knows when I'm lying. I just wondered why she was so keen on the idea of me going off for a night of carousal with Michael and Marcus. What did she have planned?

Whatever was going on in that beautiful blonde head of hers, I knew it was pointless trying to argue. In fact, there was a line from an old TV series that had rerun when I was a kid, spoken by a blonde bombshell of an actress who bore a close resemblance to my wife, except that I'd never have let Deborah out of the house wearing that uniform. Hell, I'd never have let her out of the bedroom!

Resistance is futile.

"OK, so tomorrow night Marcus, Michael and I will go on a bachelor night out. What do you and Angel plan on getting up to?"

Deborah said nothing, but the smile she gave me was quite enough without words. That smile meant trouble with a capital T.

1st February 2275

Angel

My big sister wouldn't tell me what she had planned for our evening out, but she promised me it would be fun. She'd been in touch with some of the women who worked for her publisher, and together they had planned something that promised to be interesting at the very least. A lot of people make the mistake of assuming that Demon is as cool and collected as her Ice Queen image. Wrong. She didn't get that nickname for nothing, you know. Beneath that icy surface lies a tempestuous personality and a wicked sense of humor, both of which are normally kept under tight rein, but when my sister chooses to let her hair down, watch out!

Michael and I had spent the afternoon fooling around in our room, making up for the fact that it would be late before we got chance to fall into bed together that night. Well, it was another cold, wet winter's afternoon, the fire in our bedroom was blazing, and the rug in front of the fire was just too inviting. What else could we do to pass the time? I have to admit that after two weeks of continuous over-indulgence I was walking with a slight limp, but who cares? It was worth it.

Getting dressed had taken longer than I'd planned, as every time I tried to put on an item of clothing, Michael would take it off again. I told him to stop it, but he wouldn't listen. Maybe I should have whispered the words louder. Sometimes my husband could be a little hard of hearing. Nothing else in that room was a little hard, that was for sure. The most important thing was rock hard and raring to go. Repeatedly.

When Demon came and banged on the door, calling for me for the third time, I finished banging my husband for the fourth time, and left him lying on his back, naked on the rug in front of the fire, while I got dressed. He just lay there, watching me, with the most appealing

little smile on his face, and his hands clasped behind his neck. He looked good enough to eat, and when I saw his cock twitching as he watched me dress, it took all my will power not to start again, doing just that.

How can I describe just how wonderful he looked at that moment? I can picture him clearly in my mind, his long legs stretched out across the rug, the flickering flames of the fire casting shadows across his flat belly and solid chest. Michael had a small clump of dark hair in the center of his chest, just turning gray, and a line running down to his belly, pointing directly to the part of him I enjoyed most. Dragging my gaze away from his large cock, I remember caressing his broad shoulders with my eyes, before looking up to his strong jaw, wide, sensual mouth, and to his beautiful brown eyes.

Michael's body wasn't as hard and slimly muscled as Matt's, but he was both taller and wider, and he kept in shape. Come to think of it, Matt looked as if he might have gained a little weight around then. Maybe the life of a husband and father was making him soft. Shaking thoughts of my brother-in-law out of my head, I continued to gaze at my husband as I pulled on my boots.

The way he looked at me melted my heart. How could someone express so much love just with his eyes and a smile? No one else had ever looked at me like that, and all I wanted to do was to rip off my clothes and pounce on him again.

"Angel! We're going to be late! Get a move on!" My sister's voice bellowed through the door, and she was beginning to sound annoyed. I sighed and stood, moving over to where Michael still lay gazing up at me, and I dropped to my knees by his side. Leaning over him, I gave him a gentle kiss.

As our lips met, his arms wrapped around me, and before I knew it, he was lying on top of me, his lips pressing mine open, his tongue dueling with mine. I started to melt inside, and responded with the full heat of my passion for him, when he broke away abruptly, and grinned down at me.

"Have a good night out with the girls, but don't forget, my boy's waiting for you when you get home."

Michael grabbed my hand and pulled it down his body until my palm rested against his cock. I laughed and squeezed it gently, drawing a groan of pleasure from my husband.

"How could I forget? Just don't let Matt lead you astray."

Michael raised an eyebrow then winked at me as he rolled off me, and sprang to his feet. You have no idea just how gorgeous he looked standing above me, stark naked, with his cock half aroused.

"How do you know I won't lead Matt astray?" He asked, ingenuously.

Laughing, I held out my hand and he pulled me to my feet. "I know Matt, that's how. Now get some clothes on before I ravish you again."



"Yes, Ma'am" Michael gave me a mock salute as he turned and walked toward the bathroom, giving me a wonderful view of his firm butt. I reached out and slapped it as he left the bedroom, then grabbed my coat and ran out of the door, hurrying downstairs to where my sister was waiting impatiently in the hall below.

"What kept you?" Demon was tapping her foot as I shrugged on my coat.

"What do you think?" I winked and grinned at my sister, who burst into laughter and hustled me out of the door.

Gideon

"Now, we're just here for the poker, OK?" I gave my two companions a stern glance and wondered how I'd gotten into this mess. Marcus nodded enthusiastically and I groaned inwardly. How could a man who had spent years working as a Ranger, roaming the galaxy, literally giving his life for the cause, be so damned naïve? I'm sure General Ivanova found his apparent innocence charming, but it worried the hell out of me.

A quick glance at Michael showed he shared some of my concerns, as he asked, "What else is there on offer, Matt?"

I swallowed a little nervously, glancing up and down the dark alleyway in which we stood, huddled together against the driving rain. At least Marcus had removed his Ranger's cloak, and he looked a lot less noticeable in one of my old leather jackets. "There's a sort of floor show at the front of the house. Nothing worth watching. None of the women they have performing there comes close to our wives for looks. If you want to watch that sort of thing, you'd be better off staying home."

That was the honest truth. Between us, we'd married three of the most beautiful women in the galaxy. There were one or two others, like my sister-in-law, Lily, who were just as lovely, but the sort of women who performed at this club weren't in the same class.

"The only reason we've come here is for the poker. It's one of the best games in the city, so just forget what's going on at the front of the house, and follow me straight through to the back, OK?"

I turned and marched up the alleyway, stopping at an unmarked door, where I pressed a buzzer in a cadence known to few. Don't ask how I knew it, OK?

Well, since you asked nicely, I won the code at the poker table. Just don't tell anyone else.

The door opened silently, and we slipped through into a dark vestibule, where a huge Narn stood guard. For a moment, I was irresistibly reminded of my old friend G'Tan. I sighed, thinking I would be far better off if he had come to visit, as we'd have stayed home with our wives, playing with the kids and pouchlings. Maybe I was getting too old for this kind of adventure?

I muttered the required password, and the Narn nodded, pressing a button that opened the inner door. Michael and Marcus followed me through into the club. It hadn't changed much

since I had been there a few months earlier. The lighting was dim, with the exception of the spotlight that lit the center of a small stage. The woman performing on that stage brought the three of us to a dead halt.

She was a voluptuous red-head, with pale skin and a stunning body, all of which was fully displayed as she cavorted, naked, on the stage. Her body was enough to give any man pause, with her full--probably fake, but well faked--breasts, narrow waist, slim hips and long shapely legs. As she writhed around, turning her back toward us, we could see that her butt looked as good as the rest of her. Talk about 'buns of steel'. That lady could have cracked an egg between those cheeks. A hard-boiled egg.

Despite the lusciousness of the visual display, it wasn't the woman who had stopped the three of us in our tracks. It was the snake. This was something we certainly *couldn't* see at home.

The snake was at least three meters long, and it wrapped and coiled itself around the red-head in a way that made it clear that it was *very* fond of her. It then did something that made it clear that she was very fond of it, too, and that it was very well trained. I haven't seen anything like that since watching Max Eilerson's special video collection.

All three of us tilted our heads to one side, then I heard Marcus whisper, "I'm not sure that's legal. Perhaps I should call the R.S.P.C.A."

I shook my head--my neck was starting to ache, anyway--and whispered back. "I'm damned sure it's not legal, but I don't think the snake is suffering."

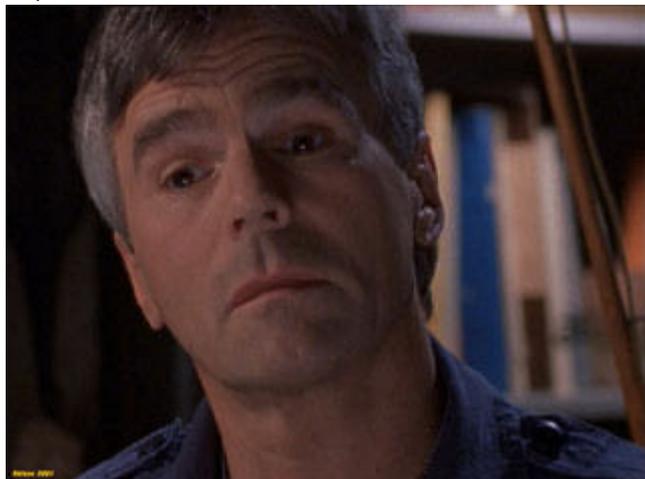
We watched a little while longer, as the snake was retired to the darkness of the outer edge of the stage. I could only hope that someone snagged it and bagged it. I'd hate to think of that thing crawling around the floor in the darkness. Given what it had obviously been trained to do, it could give an unsuspecting customer a *very* nasty surprise.

The red-head then moved on to display her virtuosity with ping-pong balls. She was damned good. She could have taken a man's eye out at fifty paces if she'd tried. Of course, she was helped by the fact that most of the men in the club had their eyes out on stalks at that point.

When the huge Narn who had been guarding the vestibule slid onto the stage next to the red-head, wearing the same amount of clothing as she did--none--I decided it was time to leave. What was about to happen may well have been educational for the others, but I'd seen it all before. Mr. Eilerson's video collection was *quite* extensive. Snow White and the Seven Narns had been somewhat explicit, and I really didn't need to experience that sense of inferiority again. Deborah tells me that I'm the perfect size and any more would be uncomfortable, and I choose to believe her.

"Poker!"

Michael looked around at me in surprise and I realized he'd misheard me. "No, not 'poke her', I said poker! That's what we're here for, isn't it?"



Marcus came out of his daze and closed his mouth for the first time since we'd entered the club. "Yes, of course, poker. Lead on, Matthew."

I shook my head again, and led us into the back where the card games were held. Given Marcus' performance on B5, I'd be lucky if we didn't end up taking the snake home with us.

Angel

I was intrigued when I saw the name of the place Demon had selected for my night out: The Slave Market. We had joined the two ladies from her publishing house at a bar, then proceeded to the venue from there. As we handed our coats into the cloakroom, one of the girls from the publishers, Jenni, told us about the place.

"It's a restaurant based on ancient Rome. Guests decide how many and which 'slaves' they want to serve their dinner. This place is aimed mainly at hetero women and gay men. There's another place across town for hetero men and lesbians. The 'slaves' are dedicated to your pleasure." Jenni gave us a wink as we walked through into a large open area, lit and heated to appear like an open courtyard on a summer's evening. It was beautifully decorated, with tables scattered around the large 'open-air' area. Each table had couches surrounding it, rather than the usual chairs. It was obvious that eating here was done in the reclining position.

A hostess, dressed in a Roman style toga, appeared and Jenni spoke quietly to her. The hostess smiled and waved us toward a table set up on the far side of the courtyard, near to an area that was laid out like a stage. There was obviously going to be a floor-show later.

As we followed our hostess, Demon leaned toward me and whispered, "Jenni tells me she has booked two 'slaves' for us this evening. One of them is to look after the three of us," she gestured at herself, Jenni, and the other lady, Helen, "and the other is just for you. Jenni asked me what type of 'slave' you might prefer, so I hope you like our choice." Demon winked and went on, "It's all just for fun, of course. The 'slaves' are our waiters for the evening, but it's nice to know that we'll get excellent service here."

When I saw the two men waiting at our table, I couldn't help but lick my lips, wondering just how excellent the service might be. They were both *very* good looking but one of them...

The taller of the two men stepped forward as I approached, and dropped to one knee in front of me, bowing his head, and laying one hand against his bare chest. "Mistress Angel, I am your slave for the night. My name is Troy." He looked up at me and gave me a saucy wink. This was obviously the man Jenni had chosen for me, and she had indeed chosen well.

When Troy stood upright again, I could see he was a little shorter than my husband, perhaps the same height as Matt. He had a slim build, with broad shoulders, a well muscled chest, and a flat, six-pack stomach. All this was displayed beautifully by his costume, which left him naked from the waist up, with just a heavy gold and turquoise decorated collar resting against his hairless chest, and decorative wrist-guards wrapped around each wrist. The white leather shorts he wore showed me exactly how tight his butt was, as he turned to lead me to my couch. They also showed off his long, lightly muscled legs. You can imagine that I gave his back view a thorough examination as I followed him.

As Troy helped me into a reclining position on my couch, I could see that his beautiful body was topped by a gorgeous head, and a mop of black curls that fell around neat ears and a long, slender neck. Troy's eyes were dark brown, topped by straight black eyebrows and sparkling with humor and intelligence. Something about those eyes reminded me of my husband. They were the same color and had the same look of mischief in them. Troy had beautifully sculpted cheekbones, a long straight nose, and a sensual mouth. A very kissable mouth.

I told myself sternly that I was newly married, and that this young man was probably several years my junior. [Yes, but he'd make a lovely boy toy,] my inner voice responded, mischievously. Telling the voice to shut up, I let the gorgeous young puppy--those eyes also reminded me irresistibly of a lively puppy-dog, just dying to please his mistress--show me the selection of dishes available that evening, and take my order for dinner.

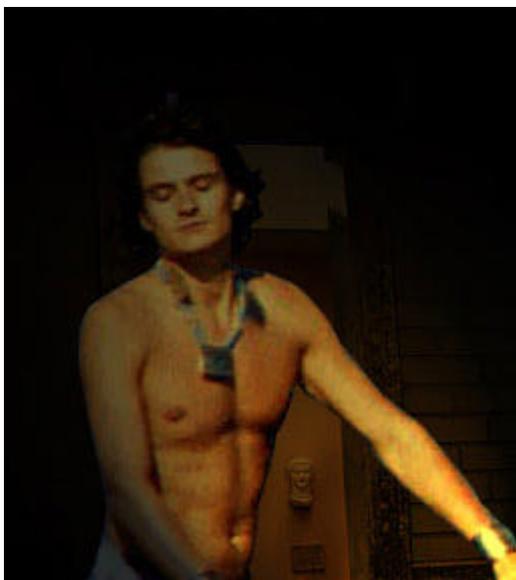
When our 'slaves' had gone to bring our food and wine to the table, Demon lay on her couch, at right-angles to mine, and winked at me, asking me what I thought of the place. I assured her that I loved it, and that Troy was perfectly suited to be my slave for the evening.

My big sister chuckled, saying, "Just remember, he's here to serve you, not to service you, and you can't take him home."

I stuck my tongue out and reminded her that I was now extremely well serviced at home, thank you very much, adding, "Mind you, if I'd come here when I was still single, I'd have happily taken young Troy home to play with. Sadly, I don't think Michael would approve if I tried that now."

Demon laughed and agreed. "I think Michael could snap your pretty-boy Troy in two like a twig. My slave looks a little more robust, at least." Demon's 'slave' was an attractive older man, who served her, Helen and Jenni, while joking and laughing with them. He was efficient, but much less attentive than my Troy.

Troy dedicated himself to my pleasure and he did it very well indeed. Actually, he did a lot of it by standing next to my couch looking unbelievably cute, but he was a very good waiter, too. My 'slave' had obviously been well-briefed on my likes and dislikes, and he served me a wonderful meal, with a delightful selection of wines, each poured carefully, in sufficient quantities to make me feel very mellow, without actually getting me drunk.



The best moment of the evening was when he approached my couch, offering a large tray with a selection of delectable looking desserts. At first I declined his offer, but Troy gave me a wicked smile, saying, "Please, mistress, be naughty just this once. I won't look, I promise."

He closed his eyes and turned his head away, leaving me staring more at the arms and body holding the tray than the desserts on it. A thought ran through my mind, [If I was going to be naughty, I'd take *you* for dessert, young Troy. You certainly look good enough to eat!]

Suppressing such thoughts and reminding myself that I now had a very sexy husband waiting for me at home, I took one of the sweets and thanked him. Troy opened his eyes, then winked at me. I could have sworn he knew exactly what was going through my mind. By the time the floor-show started, and the lights dimmed, I decided I was enjoying my night out very much indeed.

Then I felt a long, lean body lay itself on the couch behind me, and I smiled naughtily as I wiggled my butt. A soft groan from behind me was followed by a whisper in my ear. "I never thought I'd get the chance to serve the beautiful and famous Angelique Denier. I can't remember another occasion when I've enjoyed my slavery so much."

I laughed and turned to look over my shoulder at him, giving him a coy glance. "I can't remember an occasion when I've enjoyed being served so much, Troy. You're a very good slave, you know."

Troy gave me a twinkling smile, and dropped his head, trailing light kisses along my neck as he whispered, "I can be an even better slave in private."

I jolted slightly, moving my butt away from his hard groin. I could feel Troy becoming aroused, and that hadn't been my intention at all. A little flirtation was fun, but I hadn't planned to lead the poor boy on.

As I moved, my foot kicked my bag, knocking it to the ground. Troy moved instantly, recovering my bag, and the contents that had spilled out, including my comm. link. He went to slip the comm. link back into the bag, then paused and looked up at me, a frown creasing his handsome brow.

"I think someone has been trying to call you." He held the comm. link out for me, and I could see the red flashing light indicating that I had an urgent message waiting. Smiling, I thanked him and took the link, keying my message service. The call was from my husband.

Michael's voice sounded anxious as he said, "Angel, we've got a bit of a problem and need some help. Matt has tried to call Demon, but he can't get through. Can you come to this address at once?" He gave me an address that was unfamiliar, then went on, "Don't call back, as they're taking my comm. link away as soon as I've made this call."

The line went dead, and I quickly pulled at my sister's sleeve, dragging her attention away from the show on stage. I whispered frantically, "Demon! We have to go!"

Gideon

"It was the snake." The words were spoken with conviction.

"Personally, I think it was the Narn. No-one seemed bothered until then. It couldn't have been the ping pong balls; they were positively tame compared to the rest of her act. The snake didn't seem at all perturbed, but there are some things the English draw the line at, and I suspect that public fornication with aliens crosses that line by some considerable margin. I remember once hearing about...."

"Shut up." I interrupted Marcus' prattling before he could start on yet another rambling story about some completely unrelated event. I don't think I've ever known anyone who can talk like Marcus Cole. To be trapped in a confined space with him for days on end would be my idea of hell. I don't think we would both survive, and I'll leave it to you to decide which one of us would walk away, whistling quietly, and who would be left impaled on his Denn'bok.

"It wasn't the snake, it wasn't the ping pong balls and it wasn't the Narn. It was a certain Ranger's complete inability to keep his mouth shut that landed us here." I glared from Marcus to Michael and back again as I waved at the room in which we were confined.

'Room' wasn't quite the right word. 'Cell' would be more accurate. There were two bunks, one on either side of the cell, with a urinal placed tastefully between them, and bars replacing one wall. Michael and Marcus sat next to each other on one bed, while I sat on the other, leaning forward with my elbows resting on my knees, trying to keep as much of my body as possible out of contact with anything in that cell. I had my hands clasped tightly in front of me, where I could watch them and make sure they didn't accidentally wrap themselves around Marcus' neck.

The Ranger started to protest and I quelled him with another glare. I was surprised it worked. It hadn't when I'd tried to shut him up in the club, when the police raided it.

We'd played about five hands of poker when the cops burst in, and Marcus had been relatively silent--well, silent for *him*--during the game. It was too good to last, of course. If Marcus had kept quiet, we'd probably have got away with giving them fake names and addresses. In those circumstances the police don't expect any of the customers to give their *real* names. It didn't matter how famous you were, or even if they recognized you, they'd accept 'Fred Flintstone' or 'Elmer Fudd', give you a stern look, and send you on your way.

Unless you pissed them off, of course, which anyone with any sense would avoid. Anyone with any sense would smile sweetly, co-operate completely, peel off a snappy salute and depart as fast as possible.



The phrase 'anyone with any sense' could never be applied to Marcus Cole. Oh no, Marcus had to get huffy and self-righteous, demanding to know what charges were being brought against him. He gave his *real* name--which sounded a little odd for a man whose companions were Wile E Coyote and Buck Bodgers (I couldn't resist that last bit of sniping at my hated ancestor)--and insisted that he should be allowed to call his legal representative.

I could see the cop who was dealing with us getting more and more irritated. The last thing he needed was all the paperwork associated with actually charging us. Michael--excuse me--Wile E and I tried to shut him up, but Marcus was having none of it. He demanded his rights and he got them. The right to be charged with participating in illegal gambling and public obscenity, the right to be frog-marched out of the club to the police paddy-wagon, and the right to be thrown into a cell for the night. He was damned lucky he didn't get the right to be roughed up in the dark alley leading from the club out to the main street.

Unfortunately, Wile E and I got our rights, too, and we got dragged away with him.

When we got to the station, we were told we could each make a single call on our comm. links before they were taken away from us. I suggested to Marcus that he might like to call his wife, as I was sure she could arrange for our release, using her contacts. Some semblance of intelligence must have returned to whatever Marcus was using for a brain at that point, as he paled slightly and said he was sure that Susan wouldn't be contactable.

Michael and I looked at each and sighed. Neither of us relished the prospect of getting our wives to come and bail us out, but there was little alternative. We discussed calling Michael's brother, my old Sergeant, Ben Healy, but he was too far away in his retirement home in Florida. It would have taken him hours to reach us, by which time our wives would have found out about our predicament anyway. And Ben would never have stopped laughing at us.

With great reluctance, I lifted my link and called Deborah. I didn't get quite the response I expected. The call went through, and I heard my wife's deep, soft tones as she answered, "Deborah Gideon." Before I could speak, she went on, "I'm sorry, I'm not taking calls at the moment, but if you leave a message, I'll call you back as soon as I can."

Cursing under my breath, I left a message for her to call the police station number as soon as possible. The arresting officer provided the number, then took my comm. link away. I wondered exactly where Deborah was, and just how long it would take her to call. I could only hope that she wasn't somewhere as disreputable as the club we'd been caught in, and that she wasn't planning on staying out all night. You never can tell with Deborah. That beautiful, blonde, innocent look is misleading.

Michael had no more success with his call to Angel. Whatever our wives were up to, it obviously involved something that prevented them answering their links. Having left a message giving Angel the station address, Michael handed over his link, and we both looked at Marcus.

The Ranger shook his head vehemently and held his link out to the officer. "I'm not calling Susan, and there's no one else on this planet that can help, so you may as well take this now." He glared defiantly at Michael and me as he spoke, then added, "And I'm not calling Delenn, either!" I guess I could understand his position. There was no way I would ever have called on Susan Ivanova or the Head of the Rangers to bail me out of jail, either.

The cop escorted us to the cell, banged the bars shut, then left us to our own devices. He was probably hoping that Michael and I would quietly murder Marcus, dismember his body and dispose of it down the toilet. It was a tempting idea, which is why I shut Marcus up when I did. Michael was getting a glint in his eye that didn't bode well for the Ranger's long term or even short term life expectancy, and I didn't want to have to explain to General Ivanova why her husband was missing. Actually, I didn't want to have to explain to Deborah, Angel and Lily either, after all the trouble they'd gone to when they'd resurrected him.

For a moment I pondered the mystery of how and why Susan put up with Marcus. I decided he must have hidden assets, then told my brain to stop right there, as I didn't want to speculate on what those assets might be.

The clanging of the door to the cell-block provided a welcome distraction from my train of thought, which I've never had much success in derailing once it starts down a certain line. The

sight of my wife and sister-in-law following a police officer into the cell-block was less welcome. Don't get me wrong. I think Deborah and Angel are the two most beautiful women in the galaxy, and I knew they were the only way out of the mess we were in, but I also knew Michael and I would end up paying heavily for their help. Not in cash, but in kind.

Deborah has a heart as big as a house, but she also has a memory like an elephant. She would *never* let me forget this, and looking at Michael, I could see he was thinking the same about Angel.

Angel

It was hard to keep a straight face as we walked up to the bars of the cell. The men looked so sheepish and guilt-ridden. They knew that Demon and I were never going to let them forget that night.

When I'd told Demon about Michael's call, she'd immediately checked her own comm. link and found Matt's message. They must have tried to call us during the time when dinner was being served, when the clatter of plates and glasses drowned out the noise of the comm. links. Demon called the number Matt had given and the person answering the call explained our husbands' predicament.

We had immediately excused ourselves to Helen and Jenni, and I'd given a very forlorn looking Troy a quick kiss on the cheek, and a very large tip for his excellent service, then ran out of the restaurant hard on my big sister's heels. We'd called a cab, and got to the station as fast as we could, although Demon had muttered that maybe we should leave our men to fester for a while, as it would teach them a lesson.

I had told her, quite sharply, that any lessons my new husband needed teaching could be learned from me, in the privacy of our bedroom. Demon had smiled at that thought and just for a moment I almost felt sorry for Matt. Then I reminded myself that he'd got my brand spanking new, hardly used, still under warranty husband--there's that word again. Husband. Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine. I dragged my thoughts back on line--Having got my gorgeous new husband into this mess, Matt deserved whatever he had coming.

When we arrived at the police station we were taken to an interview room, where a rather charming officer explained that Michael, Matt and Marcus--or rather Marcus Cole, Wile E Coyote and Buck Bodgers--had been arrested during a raid on an illegal gambling den. Something about his manner made me think that more than just gambling had been involved, but he wouldn't say more, just telling us that he was prepared to release the men into our custody. From the smile he gave us, it was obvious he knew we would punish our men far more severely than he ever could.

Demon and I thanked him politely, and waited while he called down to the cell-block, warning the officer on duty that we would be coming down. While he was talking, I could see the police officer examining my sister and me closely. There was no doubt that he liked what he saw. By the time the call was over, he'd undressed both of us with his eyes, and then had to drag his dusty tongue off the floor.

He wasn't unattractive, but I can think of better places to be leered at than in a shabby and

run-down police interview room. I would much rather have been subjected to Troy's polite lechery back at the restaurant, and I planned to let Michael know about my dissatisfaction in no uncertain terms. Of course, I didn't plan to tell him exactly why I was annoyed at having my pleasant evening so abruptly terminated. The least he knew about young Troy the better.

Eventually, the officer led the way to the cell-block, opening the door and waving us through. I had no doubt that this gesture arose less from politeness than from his eagerness to check out the view of Demon's butt and my rear end. I gave him a special wiggle to thank him for releasing our men without charge, and moved forward to the cell where my husband was sitting next to Marcus, with Matt on the opposite bunk.

Drawing on my acting skills I smiled sweetly, then put on a long-suffering look, and sighed deeply. I shook my head at Michael and said sadly, in my best Southern accent, "Wiley, darlin', when will you learn? I told you last time I had to bail you out that I wouldn't come runnin' so quick again. Maybe I should just leave you here to learn your lesson."

I'd guessed that Michael had given the name Wile E Coyote, as it just *had* to be Matt who had called himself Buck Bodgers.



Michael lifted his long, lean frame from the bed and approached the bars of the cell, giving me his very best puppy-dog smile. He responded in an accent that put mine to shame, "Hell, Loretta, you know ah just cain't help ma-self. When ah get the urge to gamble, ah jest gotta get ma hands on them cards."

Suppressing a splutter of laughter I lifted my chin and replied haughtily, "Well, you can be danged sure that them cards is *all* you's gonna get your hands on tonight! You can sleep out in the barn with the mules."

While this exchange was going on, the police officer had stopped leering long enough to open the cell door, allowing Marcus and Matt to emerge. Whatever Demon said to Matt was whispered so quietly I couldn't hear it, but I saw Matt take my sister's hand and kiss it gently. Demon's face was frozen into the expressionless mask she often wore around strangers, so I couldn't be sure whether she was really mad or not. Her face is always hard to read, but from years of experience, I was guessing she was more amused than annoyed.

Marcus came bounding out of the cell like a puppy let off the leash, until Matt yanked his chain hard, saying, "Let's get out of here. Then we can call Susan and get her to collect you."

The mention of his wife's name was enough to take all the bounce out of Marcus' step. He immediately looked like a dog that knows it's just disgraced itself by pooping on the dining room floor in front of guests. Hang-dog hardly covered his expression, and again I had to suppress a laugh.

Demon intervened before anyone could speak again, saying quietly, "Let's all go home. I'm sure the kind officer has other more deserving characters waiting to occupy his nice cell." She turned and gave the policeman a gentle smile that left him speechless, and led Matt out of the cell-block.

Marcus slunk out after them, and Michael pulled on my hand, saying, "Come on, Loretta, we cain't keep them mules a-waitin'."

Gideon

I lay in bed with my arm around my wife's shoulders and wondered why we didn't do this more often. When we'd arrived home, Deborah had led me silently to the bedroom, undressed me, pushed me back onto the bed and then we'd made love. Slowly and passionately, like we'd always done when we'd lived on board the Excalibur, but seemed to have stopped doing since Mattie was born.

That was part of the answer to my question, of course. Marcus had been a quiet baby, who went to sleep early at night, and slept late in the mornings, allowing Deborah and me long evenings and early mornings in which we'd made love often. Mattie was a different baby altogether. She woke early and noisily, demanding our attention, depriving us of the time for those long, lazy sessions of passion we'd enjoyed so much.

Another part of the answer was Deborah's slow recovery from the appalling injuries she'd suffered after Galen's attack. It had been months later before Sarah had given us the all-clear to start making love again. For some reason, Deborah had seemed almost reluctant to resume our physical relationship, and I hadn't wanted to push the issue, fearing that she was still in pain.

Even that didn't explain why we didn't start making love every night again when Deborah's recovery was complete. Unfortunately, that was down to me. I'd started taking a drink or two, or three, after dinner, when Deborah was working away, and I'd continued to drink, even when she was home. So often, when we went to bed, I'd fallen asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. Deborah had never commented or complained, so I'd thought she didn't miss our passion as much as I did. That night she showed me how stupid I'd been.

Our passions had been reignited for a few days when Angel had married. I'm not sure why, but having Angel there in the house had made me appreciate my wife's beauty and sexiness again, and for a couple of days, I'd gone back to touching her whenever I could, kissing her and fondling her. Deborah had responded passionately, but somehow as soon as Angel and Michael had left on their honeymoon, I'd started drinking again, and stopped making love to my wife.

As Deborah lay in my arms, gently playing with the hairs on my chest, I wondered why I'd been so stupid. Was it something to do with my feelings for Angel? I realized they were becoming unhealthy, almost obsessive. All my previous excuses for why I had stopped making love to my wife paled into insignificance compared to one unpalatable fact. I was jealous. Jealous of Angel and Michael. I had let my jealousy over Angel's marriage affect the way I behaved toward my wife, and it had to stop.

I lowered my head and brushed Deborah's forehead with my lips, whispering, "I love you. I don't tell you that often enough any more."

She looked up at me with her big, amber eyes, smiling gently as she lifted her hand and stroked my face. "I love you, too. I should tell you that more often, as well. I'm not so good at sending

my feelings any more, not since..." Deborah's voice ran down into silence and I kissed her gently. Galen's attack on her had weakened her powers, although she'd proved conclusively a few moments before that she still sent her orgasms as powerfully as ever. I must have been monumentally stupid to neglect her in the way I had.

After a few moments of silence, during which time we held each other tightly, Deborah asked, "So exactly why did the police raid the club? Something tells me that it wasn't just the gambling."



I laughed and told her about the stripper and the Narn, which Marcus seemed so convinced was the cause of the raid. Deborah pulled a face. "Narns and humans may be anatomically compatible, but I've never fancied the idea. G'Tan was a sweetheart, and I loved him dearly, but his skin wasn't exactly smooth. Having sex with a Narn could leave a girl with the equivalent of stubble rash in some very uncomfortable places!"

I laughed again, and started to explore some of those places, while telling her about the ping pong balls. That caused Deborah to let out a snort of laughter--well, it was either the ping pong balls or what I was doing to her just then. She insisted that any women who exercised the appropriate muscles regularly could do what the stripper had done. I made a mental note to ask for a demonstration sometime, and went on to tell her about the snake.

Deborah went very still and when I looked at her face, her eyes had gone wide. She whispered, "Eww! Lily has a snake tattoo on her breast, but that's just gross!"

I lifted my head and laughed, making a sarcastic comment about John and Luke having practice at snake handling, then Deborah started to smile: a wide, wicked smile.

My wife pushed me onto my back, sliding down my body as her hand slipped between my legs and started to caress my balls. I groaned softly as she looked up at me and winked.

"Poor girl has to use a pathetic substitute. Only I get to play with the one and only, fully functional, Kaa."

Angel

I looked down at Michael and gave him a wicked smile. He looked so sexy with his wrists tied together above his head, naked on the bed beneath me. He was looking up at me as I straddled his hips, and there was just a hint of nervousness in his big, brown eyes.

"Uh, Angel? I'm not so sure about this..."

I closed his mouth with a kiss and wriggled, grinding my groin into his, feeling his response. Michael closed his eyes and gave a little sigh of pleasure, so I moved my hands down to his nipples and gave a little tweak. My husband's eyes flew open and he let out a little yelp.

"Hey! Those puppies are sensitive. Don't hurt them; that would be cruelty to dumb animals!"

I giggled and reached behind me to unhook my bra, then leaned forward, rubbing my nipples gently across his. Michael's eyes closed again and he gave a little groan this time. To be honest, I'm not sure whose nipples got harder, faster.

"You just lie still and take your punishment, Wiley. You've been a bad boy and your Loretta is going to have some fun." I grinned down at him, tightening the scarves that bound him with my mind. It is *so* much fun being a telekinetic at times.

Sliding off his groin, I worked my way down Michael's body, licking and sucking his chest, his flat belly, his hips, his thighs, all the way down to his toes, carefully avoiding his groin. By the time I got to his feet, tied by the ankles to the foot of the bed, Michael was thrusting his hips upward, his swollen cock swaying above his hips.

"For God's sake, Loretta! Get back up here and do your thang! Or my thang, anyway!" I couldn't help laughing as he lapsed back into the fake Southern accent. Sliding my panties down over my hips, I threw them to the floor, and then started working my way back up Michael's legs, until I finally licked his cock with just the tip of my tongue. I think if it had gotten any harder it might have exploded.

I couldn't wait any longer, so I positioned myself above him, and then lowered myself carefully onto his stiff cock, feeling him moving deeper and deeper inside me as he thrust his hips upward, and I thrust down in time with his movements. Each plunge stretched me a little further, until he was as deep inside me as he could get, and I started to pulse my vagina in time with Michael's thrusts.

We worked each other closer and closer to orgasm, with me riding Michael's hips, leaning back and grasping his ankles, feeling the fabulous friction of his cock penetrating my core. Everything inside me was tensing, building to an explosion, when suddenly I felt Michael's hands grasp my shoulders.

While I was distracted, he had worked his wrists and ankles loose from the scarves I had tied him with, and now he turned me on my back, pressing me into the mattress as he lay on top of me, still thrusting hard. That's what happens when I let a man distract me! I'd completely forgotten to keep the scarves tight with my telekinesis and our constant movements had worked them loose, letting Michael free.

My husband grinned down at me, never pausing in his movements as he whispered, "OK, Loretta, let's hear you scream a little." Actually, I screamed rather a lot, as he made me come, again and again, until he finally lost control and came with me, releasing his hot seed deep inside me.

When we had both recovered our breath, Michael lifted himself off me, and lay at my side, gathering me into his long, strong arms and holding me tight. I've never felt safer than I did in Michael's arms.

After a few moments, he kissed me gently on the forehead and said, "I need a drink after that. Do you want something?"

I shook my head and watched as my husband walked across the room, enjoying the sight of his naked butt. He stood with his back toward me, pouring himself a drink from the tray on the dresser. One of the things I loved about staying in my sister's house is her attention to

detail. Bedrooms always have a tray with coffee and tea making facilities, and a selection of her guests' favorite drinks.

As Michael poured his drink, I drank in the sight of his long legs, firm butt, and broad shoulders. I think I loved him more at that moment than I had when I'd married him, and my love for him continued to grow, every day we had together.

My husband turned and headed back toward the bed, but as he did so, he caught his foot on the chair by the dresser. Cursing at the pain of his stubbed toe, Michael put down his glass and bent to retrieve my bag, which had fallen from the chair when he caught his foot, spilling its contents to the floor.

"Are you OK?" I sat up and started to get out of bed, but Michael waved me back.

"I'll live." He gave me a delicious smile and went back to putting my things into my bag. Then he paused, holding a small white card in his hand, before looking up at me with a puzzled look on his face. "The Slave Market? Was that where you went tonight? I've heard of those places." He lifted an eyebrow in surprise.

I swallowed hastily, wondering how the card had got into my bag. I certainly hadn't picked it up and put it in there. The only other person who could have put it in there...One word repeated over and over in my mind as Michael looked at the back of the card and gave me another quizzical look.

"Troy? Who's this Troy who seems to have written his comm. link number on the back of this card?"

Want to know what that word was?

[Crap, crap, crap, crap, crap.]

If I ever get my hands on that boy, I will have to punish him severely. In the meantime, I had to think of an explanation for my husband. I'm not telling you what I said next, but all I can say is that I deserved an Oscar for *that* performance more than I did for the movie I eventually won it for.

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four W

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