

# The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four X - Part 1: In Memoriam

by The Space Witches



Will Angel ever recover from her loss?

## Chapter 1

June 2275

Hours of Darkness

Gideon watched Angel from across the dining room table. She sat pushing the food around on the plate in front of her. Her eyes didn't appear focused on what was in front of her, nor had she taken even a single bite, as far as he could tell, of the dinner that Deborah had prepared for them. He looked away from Angel, across to his wife. Deborah was doing as he had been, watching Angel with concern. Deborah's face was etched with deep lines of worry, as her eyes trailed down to where Angel was playing with her peas, absently pushing them around her plate with her fork.

Deborah must have sensed his scrutiny because she looked at him. Her hazel eyes reflected a

sadness that he knew wasn't just because she felt helpless at not being able to comfort Angel, who had withdrawn and had effectively closed herself off from them because of her own despair. Angel still seemed to function from day to day, but to Gideon it was as though she were a sleepwalker, going through the motions unconsciously. No, Deborah's sadness was also because of the loss that Angel had so recently and cruelly suffered.

Gideon smiled gently at Deborah who returned his smile sadly, and then he went back to observing Angel. Her usually bright blue eyes were lackluster, and mirrored such sadness and despair that it broke his heart to look into them. Her face was pale and drawn. [She hasn't been sleeping,] thought Gideon as he took in the rest of her appearance. Dark rings showed prominently beneath her eyes. Even her usually lustrous raven hair had lost its shine. At any other time had she not looked so tragic and lost, Gideon could have described her appearance as ethereal.

Gideon watched as Angel sighed and lowered her fork to her plate, then reached for the glass of red wine in front of her. He looked from her face to the glass of wine she now lifted to her lips, taking a long drink of the warm red liquid. Gideon frowned. Over the past several days Angel had had very little to eat, but her alcohol intake had increased considerably. Normally, Angel was not a drinker. The occasional glass of wine with dinner, sometimes not even then, was all she usually drank, but now she consumed a hell of a lot more than that. But then the situation was far from normal.

It had been less than a week since Angel had lost her husband, Michael Healy, and only two days since she had buried him. Michael had at first been Angel's bodyguard, hired to provide protection for her after a crazed fan had nearly killed her, and to stand between her and Lucas Buck if he ever dared show his face again. At first, Angel had not taken to the idea at all, but had finally given in to Gideon and Deborah's request to have Michael protect her from future dangers. It hadn't taken long, less than a month, and Angel and Michael had fallen in love with each other. In less than two months, they were married. Gideon felt his gut twist with anger, as it always did when he thought about how unfair and wrong it was that after only five months of blissfully happy marriage, and at long last real happiness and contentment for Angel, Michael had been ripped away from her.

Once Michael and Angel had been married, Michael had retired from his job as a bodyguard. He had been offered a position as an advisor for a security company, a job that would be far safer. Michael had known that would reassure and make Angel happy, because she feared what could happen to him as a bodyguard. But then Senator Redway had called Michael, asking a special favor of him. He had worked for the Senator years before and they had remained friends ever since. The Senator was due to appear at a conference in Washington, and due to the subject and content of the conference, he was concerned after receiving several death threats. Although the Senator felt sure that nothing would really happen, pressure had been brought on him to get himself protection and take appropriate precautions, just in case the extremist group that had made the threats was serious.

Senator Redway considered Michael to not only be a friend, but also to be one of the best bodyguards in the business. Michael had agreed, as a favor, to be there for the Senator. Angel had agreed, only because Michael had assured her that it was just a precaution, and that neither he nor the Senator, from intelligence available, really believed that there was any significant threat on the Senator's life. [How wrong they were.]

On the day of the conference, Michael was killed when he used his own body to shield the Senator from a sniper's deadly bullet. Michael had been killed instantly and what had made it worse was that Angel had been watching the live broadcast of the day's event. Gideon and Deborah had been visiting from England for a week and had been watching with Angel when her husband was killed.

For the rest of his life, Gideon would never be able to forget the expression on Angel's face or the sound of her voice, as she uttered only one word in a whisper when she saw Michael's body go down as the bullet hit him. "No."

Even though the reporter on the scene was not saying anything, Angel had somehow known that Michael had been killed instantly; a fact that hours later had been confirmed by Senator Redway himself.

In the days that had followed, Angel had started to drift away. She didn't eat, and she hardly spoke to either Deborah or Gideon. When he had spoken of his concerns to Deborah, she had hugged him and said to him softly, "Angel will talk when she's ready. Right now, she's just hurting too much to be able to find the words."

Gideon had understood that, but couldn't understand how Angel had not shed a tear over Michael's death, not even on the day of the funeral, when he knew her heart was shattered. When he had voiced those thoughts to Deborah at the reception after the funeral, she had looked at Angel then turned back to him, placing a brief tender kiss on his lips. "Sometimes the heart suffers such a severe shock that it can't react other than clamping down completely on any emotion...But Angel will cry, Matthew, the tears will come and badly, and when they do, we'll be there for her."

Gideon had thought about Deborah's words, and as he had watched Angel standing by the window looking out at the ocean, oblivious to the other mourners in the room, he had wondered if when Angel finally started crying, she would ever be able to stop. She had said goodbye to Luke, John and Lily the day before, her face expressionless, apparently unmoved by their departure. John had managed to extend his leave to attend the funeral, but could stay no longer. Lily had been devastated by having to leave her sister at such a time, but Angel hadn't reacted at all. No tears had fallen on her frozen face. Gideon recalled his wife's words '...when they do, we'll be there for her.' That is exactly where he would be, and maybe together, he and Deborah would be able to help Angel get through the hours of darkness that were yet to come.

The sound of Deborah's voice trying to coax Angel to eat something brought Gideon back to the present. "Please, Angel, try to eat something." Deborah's voice was soft and coaxing. Angel looked across to her sister and shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Demon. It looks delicious, but I'm really not hungry." Angel's voice sounded hollow and emotionless. Gideon watched as Angel pushed her plate of untouched food away and again reached for her glass of wine. She emptied the contents of her glass in one gulp, and then placing the glass down, she reached for the bottle of wine. Gideon reached out and placed his hand on the bottle before Angel could lift it to refill her glass. When she looked up at him questioningly, he spoke.

"Angel, you haven't had anything to eat all day. Drinking on an empty stomach is not a good idea." Gideon paused for a moment, to try and gauge how Angel would react, hoping that she

would somehow fight back, but she just blinked at him. He could sense Deborah's eyes on him and he could feel her silent encouragement. Gideon took the bottle and moved it out of Angel's reach. "I think you've had enough for tonight, Angel." Just for an instant, Gideon thought he could see a spark of resistance in Angel's eyes, but just as quickly, it was gone.

Gideon was disappointed as Angel looked at him and then at Deborah, then sighed, "You're right, Captain. I've had enough for tonight." Her voice was so low that Gideon could barely hear her. He watched, helpless, at a loss for words, as Angel pushed back her chair and stood up. "I'm going to call it a night..." She moved away from the table and methodically pushed the chair back into place, looking first at Deborah and then at Gideon. "Goodnight." Then without another word, Angel turned and left the dining room.

Gideon heard Deborah call softly after her sister, "Goodnight, Angel."

For a moment, neither Gideon nor Deborah said anything. Deborah was the first to break the silence. "Oh God, Matthew!" Gideon watched as Deborah's usually controlled expression disintegrated, and tears began to slide down her face.

Pushing away his chair, he stood and went over to his wife, taking her into his arms, pulling her out of her chair, to hold her tightly against his chest, his hand gently stroking her hair.

Deborah looked at him and sniffed. "It's not fair. She doesn't deserve this!" Gideon saw anger flash in his wife's eyes and he knew she was feeling just as worried, helpless, angry and frustrated as he was. He could say nothing that would make his wife feel better, so he lowered his mouth and claimed her lips in a gentle, passionate kiss.

After a moment, he broke the kiss and looked at Deborah lovingly. "No, Angel doesn't deserve this, but she'll be OK..." Gideon's voice trailed off as he wondered if he really believed that himself.

"Will she, Matthew?" It shocked him to see and hear the doubt in Deborah's face and voice. He hugged her fiercely to him. When he spoke, it was with a conviction born of both believing and needing to reassure his wife.

"Yes, she will. Together we'll make sure Angel gets through this." Gideon held onto his wife, gaining some comfort from having her body so close to his, just as he knew Deborah gained comfort from his presence. After several minutes Gideon pushed her away, so that he could smile at her gently. "How about you and I get to bed? We're both tired and maybe a good night's sleep will make things appear a little better in the morning?" Deborah nodded her agreement and Gideon put his arm around her shoulder and began to lead her out of the room.

Suddenly, Deborah stopped and looked at him with regret. "I can't go up yet..." She paused as she looked over her shoulder at the dinner table and sighed. "I have to clear the table and get the dishes washed." Gideon turned to look at the table. Trust Deborah's practical nature to come to the fore at a moment like this. He couldn't help but smile. Kissing her cheek he directed her away from the table towards the door.

"You go up and I'll take care of this..." He could see the flash of humor in Deborah's eyes as he said it, and he held up a hand to ward off any comments. "Even I can clear away a table and get the dishes into a dishwasher." Deborah grinned up at him. At least, despite everything in the

past week, both of them were able to retain their sense of humor.

"You've got a deal. I'll go upstairs and check on Mattie, then get the bed all warmed up ready for you." Deborah gave him a quick kiss on his cheek, then disappeared out the door. Gideon watched his wife go up the stairs, then turning, he set about clearing the dinner table. Ten minutes later, everything was cleared away. Switching off all the lights downstairs, Gideon made his way upstairs.

Once inside his and Deborah's bedroom, he stripped and quietly slipped into bed beside his wife, who instantly moved to lie against him. Gideon pulled her tightly to his side, glad that she was back in his bed again. It seemed that far too often recently Deborah had spent nights away from him, busy with her career. He'd tried traveling with her, but his patience had worn thin at the constant presence and intrusiveness of the media, so after a while they had agreed that he should stay at home with the children, while Deborah developed her writing career. The emotional distance between them had grown as a result, and they no longer made love every day, but Angel's loss and the tragedy of Michael's death had bridged that gap and brought Gideon and his wife back together. Tonight they were content to hold each other, neither one voicing the thoughts they had, nor their silent thanks that they had each other.

At the same time they were both trying to ignore the guilt they felt at those thoughts, knowing that in the room down the hall, Angel lay alone in the bed that she had once shared with Michael. It took Gideon nearly an hour after he felt Deborah drift off, before he finally fell into a restless sleep.

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### Hour of the Wolf

Gideon rolled over onto his back and stared up at the ceiling. He had awoken just after his bedside clock had showed 3:30am, and he had been unable, after an hour of trying, to drift back off to sleep. Turning his head, he gazed at Deborah, her hair spread out around her on the pillow, framing her face like a soft golden halo. He watched her lovingly for a moment as she slept, envying her slumber. Gideon sighed softly. He knew just lying there wouldn't help him get back to sleep.

Moving carefully, so as not to wake Deborah, Gideon got out of the bed. He pulled on his jeans and then quickly slipped into a white T-shirt. Casting one more loving glance at his wife, he turned and soundlessly left the bedroom, heading down the stairs.

[A nice walk along the beach and some fresh air should help get me back to sleep,] thought Gideon, as he opened the glass sliding door that led out onto the deck of Angel's house. The brisk pre-dawn air and the sound of the waves crashing on the beach greeted him. Gideon suddenly questioned his idea of a walk. The air was clean, cool and crisp--the kind of morning air that tended to wake one up, rather than help with relaxation.

Gideon hesitated just outside the door, as he tried to make a decision. [To hell with a walk on the beach, I have something better in mind that will relax me...and I'm sure Deborah won't mind if I wake her up for this...] Gideon smiled. Making love to his wife would relax him, and take his mind off his concerns for Angel, which he knew was the real reason he wasn't sleeping. How could anyone sleep when they were worried about someone they cared for deeply? His

mind made up, Gideon turned to go back inside. He was brought up short by a slight movement to his right.

Gideon turned to see what had caught his attention. In the darkness, he could make out a figure sitting on one of the deck chairs. It was Angel, and she sat, seemingly oblivious to his presence, staring out into the darkness of the night. Gideon took in Angel's appearance. She was dressed in a pair of oversized sweatpants and an old, well-worn, gray T-Shirt. It didn't take a brain surgeon to work out whose clothes she wore. Even a retired Starship Captain could manage that one. Gideon knew that Angel was wearing those clothes to in some way have some essence of Michael close to her.

The second thing Gideon noticed, which upset him more than her forlorn appearance, was the fact that Angel held a bottle of vodka in her hand. Gideon squinted into the darkness and was just able to make out that it was three quarters empty. Angel had clearly been out there for sometime. [Oh Angel...] thought Gideon, sadly.

Gideon contemplated his next move. Should he let Angel be, just for tonight? Or should he intervene? After a moment's hesitation, he decided on the latter. There was no way he could go back upstairs and leave her down here like this.

Gideon stepped forward and called her name, gently. "Angel?"

Angel didn't seem to hear him the first time he called, as she appeared a million miles away in her thoughts. Gideon moved right up beside her and called to her again. This time, Angel heard him and she looked up at him. It took her a little while to fully register him, but when she finally did, she broke into a broad, lopsided grin.

"Well, howdy Cap'n, whatsha doing here?" Her voice was thick and slightly slurred as she spoke.

Gideon smiled at her and moved to sit on the deck chair beside her. "I had trouble sleeping," he admitted to her, softly.

Angel raised an eyebrow and leaned forward in her chair, a little unsteadily, and peered at him. "Aww, poor Cap'n." She paused to raise the bottle of vodka to her lips. Gideon watched as she took a long, deep pull at the bottle. She swallowed and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, then she offered the bottle to him.

"Here, have a drink, it's guaranteed to help you bring on the sandman..." Again, Angel paused, as she suddenly brought the bottle back closer to her, so she could look into it. She then shook it, before offering it once again to Gideon. "Well, that's if you have enough of it."

Gideon considered taking the bottle, just to get it away from her, but he decided against it. He had to convince Angel that vodka wouldn't help her. He shook his head, and declined, saying, "Vodka won't help me sleep..."

Angel shrugged and sat back against the backrest of the deck chair, the bottle of vodka held tightly against her chest. Gideon leaned forward, his voice strong, determined to get through to her, as he continued. "Alcohol won't help you either, Angel."

Gideon could tell from the flicker of emotion in her eyes that Angel had understood his silent

meaning, but instead of agreeing with him, as he had hoped, she snorted and waved a hand at him. "Pfft. Yes it will." Her voice sounded unsteady. Gideon could hear something else in the undertone. It sounded like desperation.

Gideon sighed sadly. "How, Angel?" He didn't wait for Angel to answer as he went on, "How can it help?"

He watched as she closed her eyes. She was silent for a long time, then finally her eyes opened and she looked at him. Her eyes mirrored pain, fear, loneliness and heartbreak. Her voice was barely a whisper as she finally spoke. "It can keep the wolf at bay..."

Gideon frowned. "I don't understand."

Angel blinked at him several times then spoke again. "Haven't you heard of 'the hour of the wolf'?" Her tone somehow indicated to Gideon that he should know what it was. He shook his head.

Angel grunted softly. "No?" She paused then continued, her voice very low. "Ah well, I guess it must be a Russian thing."

Gideon was even more confused by her last comment. He opened his mouth to speak, but Angel cut him off as she began to explain. "Have you read Susan Ivanova's biography?" She waited for him to confirm that he had. The truth was that Gideon had intended to read it, he even had a copy of it back home, but he just hadn't gotten around to it yet. Again, he shook his head.

Angel quirked up an eyebrow and clicked her tongue at him. "Tsk ts, and here I thought you would have been one of the first, considering you know her personally. Besides that, you really ought to read it Captain, it's very good." Gideon waited patiently for Angel to make her point and let him know what Ivanova's book had to do with 'the hour of the wolf'. Angel now seemed to be struggling to remain focused, as the vodka began to take a stronger grip on her senses.

Finally, she went on, "In her book, Ivanova explains about the 'hour of the wolf.' It's that time between three and four in the morning when you can't sleep and all you can see are your troubles, fears and problems, and how your life should have gone, but didn't... When all you can hear is the sound of your own heart."

Gideon, sat unmoving as he listened to Angel continue, "Ivanova explained that vodka was used to keep the wolf away, as well as her cubs, if she had any." Angel suddenly laughed, dryly. "Of course, she also said that it didn't work..." Angel lifted the bottle up and saluted Gideon with it. "But I intend to be the one to prove it does." Again, Angel stopped as if contemplating what to say next. "Ivanova said that at that time she had been living in the 'hour of the wolf' for seven days, and that's where I have been since..." Angel's voice faltered and died away.

Gideon wanted to say something to comfort Angel, but there were no words. He stood up and went to sit beside her, putting his arm around her shoulders and drawing her into a hug. Angel seemed to welcome his nearness, as she shifted her position in the chair so that she could encircle his waist with one arm. She finally discarded the bottle of vodka by placing it on the ground beside the chair, and she tucked her other hand between them as she leaned against him, resting her head against his chest. Gideon let his free hand stroke her back. "Do you want

to talk about it, Angel?"

He could feel her shake her head, her voice muffled against his chest, as she said "No."

Gideon didn't push her, remembering what Deborah had said, that when she was ready, Angel would talk. "OK, but when you're ready to talk. I'll be here to listen," he said, gently. The minutes marched on. As they sat there in silence, Gideon looked out over the beach to see that the first light of day was starting to break over the horizon. He looked down at Angel, again. She had gone very still in his arms and he wondered if she had passed out, but then she moved. The hand tucked between them began to caress his ribcage, moving up to his chest.

Gideon's eyes widened with surprise. "Angel?" He asked, questioningly, ignoring the reaction his body was having, as Angel's hand settled on his chest, her finger tracing small circles around his nipple.

Angel didn't respond. She straightened up and swung her legs over the edge of the chair, shifting so that she was half turned towards him. Her hand left his chest to snake around his neck. Gideon was so astounded by the sudden change in her behavior that he didn't resist as she pulled his head towards her. At the same time, she leaned forward to begin kissing his neck, her mouth moving its way along his jaw line, toward his mouth. Gideon felt her lips part over his, as her tongue tried to work its way into his mouth. He suddenly snapped out of his surprise, and grasped Angel firmly yet gently by the shoulders, and pushed her away.

"Angel, don't..."

Angel moaned and tried to kiss him again, as her hand now moved down to his crotch, where she began to fondle him through his jeans. Gideon could feel himself begin to respond to the stimulation of her hand. He jumped up and moved away from her.

Angel looked up at him, her face flushed and her eyes unnaturally bright. She stood up and closed the space between them, raising her hands to rest them on his chest, her fingers lightly stroking him. "Please, Matthew...I need you!"

Gideon took in her uplifted face. God, she was so beautiful, and at any other time he would have been sorely tempted, but not this time, not under the circumstances. Angel's hands began to move up towards his neck with the intention of pulling his head down closer to her face, so that she could try and kiss him again. Gideon caught her wrists gently in his hands and held them away from his body.

"You don't want to do this, Angel." As Angel looked up at him, Gideon could see fear, desperation and loneliness driving at her. She tried to get her wrists free from his hold, but he tightened his grip, still careful not to hurt her. He couldn't let her do this. The alcohol combined with her own loneliness was making her behave like this. He didn't want her doing something that she would regret later. Angel continued to try and get free of his hold. "No, Angel. You..."

Her strangled cry cut Gideon off. "Please, Matthew. I'm so lonely!" The words tore at his heart and he abandoned his attempts to keep her at a distance. He pulled her into a tight hug, but made sure that her hands were trapped between them, so they couldn't wander where they shouldn't.



Gideon never usually struggled for words in any given situation, but standing there, with Angel in his arms, as the sun finally peaked over the horizon, he couldn't find the right words. What words could help? He was brought out of his reverie as he felt Angel go limp in his arms. She had finally passed out. Gideon felt relieved. This way she wouldn't do something he knew she would regret afterwards. Effortlessly, he picked Angel's unconscious form up into his arms. He gazed down as her head flopped forward and rested against his shoulder. Gideon sighed sadly and whispered a promise to her. "It will be all right, Angel. I promise."

Shifting her slightly, so he was holding her more comfortably, Gideon headed inside and up to her bedroom. He didn't know how he could keep such a promise to her, but he had meant it. Somehow, within his control or beyond it, he intended to make sure that everything would be all right for Angel, one way or the other.

Gideon reached Angel's bedroom. He carried her over to the bed and gently laid her down. He then covered her with the quilt, tucking it up around her chin as if she were a child. After a while spent watching her sleep, he bent forward and tenderly kissed her forehead. As he straightened up, Angel stirred in her sleep and said Michael's name. Then she went still again.

Gideon shook his head sadly and reached out a hand to brush away a strand of hair that had fallen across Angel's face. Then he dropped his hand to his side, sighing wearily as he turned and headed towards the door. He paused in the doorway to glance once more over at Angel, then left, quietly closing the door behind him. Gideon headed back to his own bedroom and Deborah, suddenly desperate to be with his wife.

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Demon had felt Matthew leave their bed and knew that the same unhappiness and concern that kept her awake was making her husband restless. She had lain in bed, waiting for his return, wondering if she should follow him, but eventually deciding to give him the time and space he needed to work it through for himself.

Demon was well aware of Matthew's feelings toward her sister; she had known of his love for Angel for years. Being an empath, it was impossible for her not to know such things. She also knew that they both loved her, that they would never betray her in any significant way, and that their love for her far exceeded their love for each other. Demon had never begrudged either of them the corner of their hearts they had given each other.

Turning in the bed, to stare out of the window into the slowly graying sky, Demon wondered where Matthew had gone and what he was doing. She knew he was still close by, as she could sense his feelings. Sadness, worry, pity and love were all mixed together. His feeling all those things for Angel in her grief only made Demon love him more. [If that were possible,] Demon smiled to herself.

Her thoughts turned to her son. She missed Marcus terribly. He had been with them, vacationing with Angel, when Michael was murdered. Demon was grateful that Marcus had been playing on the beach with a neighbor's children when it had actually happened. Her son had not seen his new uncle shot. Like all of them, Marcus had become very fond of Michael during the short time he and Angel had been married. Initially resentful of anyone coming between him and his favorite aunt, Michael's charm had won the little boy around. The memory of them all celebrating Marcus' sixth birthday with a picnic on the beach brought

tears to Demon's eyes.

Marcus had been distraught when they had told him that Michael had gone away and wouldn't be coming back. That distress, combined with his empathic abilities, which meant he picked up on every bit of Angel's grief, had led Demon and Matthew to decide to get Marcus away from the atmosphere of anguish and despair that permeated Angel's house. Matthew had taken their son home to England four days before, returning the next day, while Demon stayed with her sister.

Their daughter, Mattie, at only eighteen months old, was still too young to understand what was going on, and had no empathic abilities, so she had stayed with her mother. Demon had talked to her son every morning and night, and linked with him frequently, but she still missed him terribly. She knew that despite staying with his best friend's family, Marcus missed his parents, too.

Demon waited as the sky lightened further and eventually she felt Matthew returning, sensing him getting closer. She closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep, as her husband entered the room, undressed quietly and slipped into bed beside her. She didn't want him to know that he had disturbed her sleep and that she had laid awake waiting for his return.

Matthew's naked body slid between the sheets and he pulled himself close to her. His skin felt cold where it touched Demon, and she knew that he had been outside in the night air, and had become chilled. She stirred a little, letting him think that his return was awakening her. Matthew's arms closed around her, and she felt his cool lips press against her shoulder.

Demon turned in her husband's arms, pulling herself close to him, warming him as he lay next to her. She opened her eyes a little and smiled softly at him as she whispered, "So you need a bed-warmer again, do you?"

Matthew chuckled softly. "I need more than that, but that will do for a start." He pulled Demon closer, twining his legs through hers until they were touching at every point of their bodies. He started to kiss her neck, moving his lips along her jaw to her ear, then running his tongue gently around her lobe.

This time Demon chuckled, "You know that turns me on, so stop it. We can't, not here, not now. Angel will feel it."

Matthew continued to lick at Demon's ear. "No, she won't. She's asleep. Actually, she's out cold. I took a bottle of vodka away from her..."

Demon pushed him away gently, and interrupted with a worried, "Is she all right? Should I go to her?"

Matthew pulled her back tightly into his arms. "She'll probably have a killer hangover in the morning, and then you can go to her and take care of her. But right now, I need you to take care of me."

Demon lifted her hand to run her fingers gently across his cheekbone. In the dawn light, she could see the sorrow and pain in her husband's eyes, and knew that for now at least, his need for her was greater than her sister's. She kissed him gently and whispered, "I'll always take care of you, Matthew. Always and forever."

She found herself drawn into a fierce hug, Matthew's arms closing around her tightly enough to squeeze the air out of her lungs. He whispered passionately, "Promise me...Promise me you'll never leave me. Promise me that I'll never have to sit on a beach with a bottle of vodka, trying to kill the pain of losing you."

Demon's eyes filled with tears and she allowed the full extent of her love for her husband to flow out of her and over him, as she responded in the only way she could. "I promise."

They made love slowly, tenderly. Demon took all of Matthew's love into herself, combining it with her love for him, weaving it into a cocoon and sending it out to surround them both, a lifelong pledge of love, in defiance of an uncertain future.

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"She's gone, Matthew!" The sound of Deborah's voice behind him startled Gideon as he stood in the kitchen, feeding Mattie her breakfast. He turned as Deborah came to stand in front of him, her eyes wide with concern.

Gideon cleared his throat. "What do you mean, she's gone?"

"Angel! I went to check on her, to see if she was still asleep, but her bed was empty and she isn't anywhere in the house. I've also tried linking with her, but she's too far away!" Deborah's voice was thick with worry.

Gideon smiled at her gently as he took hold of her hand, squeezing it gently. "Angel has probably gone for a walk in the fresh air to clear her head of a hangover. And if she isn't responding to your call, it's probably because she wants to be alone for awhile." He turned back and finished feeding his daughter her breakfast, then carefully wiped the baby girl's mouth.

Deborah half nodded, half shook her head. "I know, but..." Her voice trailed off.

"But what?" He asked inquiringly. Deborah shook her head again. Gideon could see she was frustrated. He lifted Mattie from her high chair, and carried her over to her play pen in the corner of the room, kissing her head gently, before he set her down to play with her toys.

"I don't know, it's just...Please, Matthew, we have to go and find her. She shouldn't be alone!" Gideon was surprised to hear fear in Deborah's voice. [What is she afraid of?] Instinctively, Gideon knew the answer, but he refused to consider or dwell on it. He turned and reached out, pulling on Deborah's hand to draw her into a comforting hug.

"I'm sure Angel is OK..." The instant the words were out of his mouth, Gideon felt Deborah stiffen slightly in his arms. She wasn't going to accept his word at this stage; she needed proof to be absolutely assured. And to be honest, so did he. He pushed her away slightly, so he could look her in the eyes. "But just to be sure, how about I go and find her?"

"We'll both go!" Said Deborah, forcefully. "Two searching is better than one; we'll find her quicker that way."

Gideon nodded. "Yes, we would, but you have to stay here with Mattie. Anyway, you should be here, just in case Angel comes back?" He phrased it more as a question, as he knew Deborah well enough by now to know that telling her to do something would only make her do the

complete opposite.

Deborah was still for a moment as she thought about it, then nodded and smiled at him with grateful relief. "You're right...you go and find her, Matthew. I don't want her being alone out there."

Gideon kissed his wife tenderly before responding. "I understand. I'll go get her and bring her home." He paused as another thought occurred to him. "Just don't get worried it if takes me awhile to find her, it's a long stretch of beach in two directions that I have to search..."

Deborah nodded in understanding and kissed him again. "Thank you," she said as she hugged him. After a moment, Gideon extracted himself from her hold and kissed her forehead.

"I better get going before Angel walks herself all the way to Santa Barbara." With a final kiss, Gideon said goodbye to his wife, then turned and using the kitchen door, headed out onto the beach

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Demon stood and watched out the kitchen window. Her eyes followed Matthew as he made his way down the beach until finally she lost sight of him. Closing her eyes, she again tried to make contact with Angel. After a few tries, she gave up. Her sister was either too far away to detect, or she wasn't going to respond. Demon just hoped that it was because she didn't want to talk right now and not a worse reason.

Demon shook herself mentally. She was being silly, letting herself think of worse case scenarios. She wondered if she had been overreacting by asking Matthew to go out and search for Angel. Maybe she was being overly cautious and protective about her sister, but then Angel had just lost Michael, and Demon felt a need to make sure her sister was all right.

She hoped that Matthew would find Angel quickly and bring her home. She sighed heavily. The best thing for her to do was to keep herself busy so that she wouldn't watch the clock until they returned. Straightening up, Demon began by getting a pot of coffee brewing. Once that was done, she lifted her daughter from her playpen and carried her through to the living room, settling her down on the rug. Maybe playing with the little girl would distract her.

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Gideon had picked the direction to start his search at random. He had been walking for ten minutes and so far had seen nothing of Angel. At this time of the morning, the beach was relatively deserted, with only an occasional jogger to be seen. It wasn't as if he had to search a large crowd for Angel. He continued walking, and about five minutes later he spotted a lone figure sitting on the beach, a short distance ahead of him.

With relief, Gideon realized it was Angel. She sat with her legs drawn up to her chest, her arms wrapped around her knees as her chin rested on the top of them. She sat unmoving, staring out at the ocean. Gideon moved over and quietly sat down beside her.

Angel surprised him, when without looking at him, she asked softly, "Demon sent you to find me, didn't she?"

Gideon realized that despite the weakening of their link, Angel must have heard Deborah's calls, but just hadn't responded. He didn't see any point in denying it. "Yes, she did." Gideon glanced over at Angel. "Your sister is worried about you, Angel. We both are." He watched as Angel lowered her eyes for a moment, then raised them to once again look out to sea.

"I know..." Angel sighed before she went on, her voice a little stronger, "I'm sorry to have worried you both so much."

Gideon spoke firmly. "Angel, you don't have to apologize. We love you, that's why we worry. It's not an obligation but something a family does when one of their own is hurting."

Angel was silent for a long time. Then, finally she spoke. "Maybe..." For the first time since he had found her, Angel turned to look at him. She looked at him intently before she said, "But I do need to apologize for earlier." She didn't need to go into details. They both knew what she was referring to.

Again, Gideon shook his head. "No, Angel, you also don't have to apologize..."

Angel cut him off before he could finish. "Please, Matt, don't. I do...what happened...I'm mortified by my behavior earlier. I'm sorry..." Gideon could see that she was embarrassed, as she stumbled into silence again and looked away from him.

To make sure he had her attention, Gideon reached out and touched her arm lightly. When Angel looked back at him, he smiled gently. "There's nothing to forgive. When people are grieving, they sometimes behave...well, they do things they wouldn't normally do."

Angel gave him a wry grin. "You mean like getting hammered on vodka and making a clumsy pass at their brother-in-law?" For the first time since Michael had died, Gideon could see a spark of Angel's usual humor, but before he could try and bring it out further, he saw the spark flicker and die away. Her voice was unsteady as she said in a subdued tone, "You were right though...Drinking is not going to help things. It won't bring Michael back..."

Gideon watched as she once again turned her attention to the ocean. He wanted to say something to comfort her, but there was no response to that kind of truth; no words that could ever really comfort her. Instead, he sat there beside her in silence and waited.

As the minutes ticked away, he thought of Deborah, and hoped that she wouldn't panic when he was gone for a long time. He had a feeling that he and Angel would be there for a while. He wished that he had the sister's ability to link, so that he could tell Deborah that he had found her sister and that she was all right. He didn't even have the option of leaving Angel, to go off to let Deborah know. If he returned without her sister, Deborah would kill him. Gideon cursed his own stupidity in coming out without a commlink. Well, if after an hour or so, they hadn't returned home, Gideon knew that his wife would come searching for them.

His attention was brought back to Angel, when her voice drifted quietly over to him. "You said that when I was ready to talk, you would be there to listen?" Angel looked over to confirm that he had meant it. Gideon suddenly found his throat tightening with emotion. Without saying a word, he looked at her, his eyes serious as he nodded. He saw Angel swallow reflexively.

"I'm ready to talk..."

Angel had to take a moment before she was able to start talking. For the past several days since Michael had been killed and buried, she had been in such a dark fog of despair and heartbreak that she had been unable to talk to anyone about what she was feeling. Trying desperately to drown her pain in a bottle of alcohol, she had, in the early hours of that morning, hit the bottom and found that Susan Ivanova had been right. Vodka (or any alcohol for that matter) did not keep the wolf away.

Gideon had also been right when he'd said it wouldn't help. But, now Angel was ready to talk. Her throat burned with long suppressed tears and her stomach felt as if she was standing on the deck of a storm tossed ship. Gideon's presence beside her gave her some comfort. It made it easier for her to finally talk about the man to whom she had been married for too short a time, and whom she had loved deeply and passionately.

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### In the Beginning

"From the first moment I met Michael, I knew I was in trouble." Gideon watched as Angel smiled a sad, soft smile at the memory of that first meeting.

"When Michael walked through that door beside you--this tall, lanky, handsome man with a gentle face and kind eyes--I was instantly attracted, and I was afraid because..." Angel paused to sigh. "Because bad things happen when I'm attracted to a man, or fall in love with him."

Angel's voice drifted softly between them as she began to go further into her memories. "In the days that followed, I gave him the hardest time, making his job as difficult as possible, never doing what he wanted me to do. Michael was insistent that I was to notify him well in advance when I was going out and he wanted to know what my schedule would be. Of course, I wouldn't tell him. On several occasions, I even tried to ditch him. But he always caught me out, usually turning up ahead of me, after I had managed to leave the house without him..."

Angel paused in her dialogue, smiling at the memory.

"I tried my hardest to pick fights with him. But Michael is..." Angel hesitated, as pain washed over her face when she realized that she had just used the present tense. Gideon watched as Angel shook her head and continued, correcting herself, "Michael was one of those infuriating people who never rose to the bait when someone was deliberately antagonizing him."

"I had said to you and Demon that I would try having a bodyguard for a week. Somehow, despite the fact that I was trying to make Michael go away, the week turned into two. When I could have just said, 'That's it! I don't want a bodyguard, I gave it a try for a week, but no thanks,' I didn't. I guess that was proof that I didn't really want Michael to go away." Angel gave Gideon a wry smile.

"And the longer Michael stayed, the less I wanted to get rid of him. He was smart, and he had a wonderful, wicked, dry sense of humor. I found him to be kind and gentle. People think bodyguards are all brawn, no brain, tough guys. Oh, Michael was tough and able to take care of himself and whoever his client was, but he was no brainless tough guy. Being with him, I realized that I found him charming, entertaining and that I felt safe and comfortable with him. We were becoming friends, but all that changed after his sister came to visit for a couple of days just before Christmas, with her five month old daughter."

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### The Day It All Began

Angel stood back in the doorway of the sitting room and watched as Michael took his sister into a big bear hug. "Abby, you look fantastic!" Michael said, as he all but crushed his sister against him.

Angel, forgotten for the moment by the reuniting siblings, took the time to compare them. Where Michael was tall and lean, his sister Abigail, or rather Abby as she preferred to be called, was about a head smaller than him and voluptuous, with a round, jolly face.

Michael bent down to peer into the pushchair beside Abby. "She's gorgeous," He said, beaming as he picked up the small baby from the pushchair and cradled her gently in his arms, looking at the little bundle with great love.

Abby laughed. "Of course she is. What did you expect when Brenna has a stunningly gorgeous mother like me?" Michael faked a groan then grinned down at his sister, who playfully swatted at his arm.

Angel laughed at the light, teasing, back and forth banter between Michael and Abby. It was only then that the brother and sister turned to look over at her.

Abby walked towards Angel with a warm smile. "My big brother was the one born with the good looks in the family. Unfortunately, when we were all asked to step forward for manners, Michael arrived late." Abby wrinkled her nose at her brother, but Angel could clearly see the mirth in Abby's eyes as she teased him.

Michael laughed despite himself. "I'm sorry. I'm sure Angel won't hold it against me...unlike some." Said Michael, pointedly teasing his sister back. "And she understands that I was so happy to see my sister that I momentarily forgot my manners..." Michael gave his sister a charming smile that only made her shake her head and laugh.

"OK, I forgive you. Now be a good boy and introduce us."

Michael nodded and walked over to Angel. "Angel Denier, I'd like you to meet the best sister a man could ever ask for--Abby Stevens."

Angel was a little surprised as Abby hugged her, then let go and beamed at her. "It's really an honor to meet you, Ms Denier. I don't want to come across as a star-struck fan, but I really want to tell you how much I loved you in the remake of *My Fair Lady*. You were absolutely wonderful in it. And I so looked forward to meeting you once Michael told me what a wonderful person you are."

Angel felt herself blush under the heartfelt praise. "Please call me Angel, and thank you, that means a lot to me. I've very much looked forward to meeting you. Michael has told me a lot about you."

Abby's eyebrow shot up and she looked curiously at her brother. "Hmmm, and just what tales have you been telling, Michael?"

Michael held Brenna in one arm, as he raised a hand in defense. "Only good things! I swear!"

Angel laughed and took Abby's hand in hers. She liked this woman and could see her becoming a friend. "Michael tells the truth. But, now that I have you here, maybe you can tell me a few tales about your brother?"

Abby gave a wicked chuckle as Michael protested. "It would be my pleasure, Angel."

Michael was left to trail behind with the baby as Angel and Abby walked into the sitting room.



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From the moment Michael had lifted Brenna out of the pushchair, Angel could see that he was comfortable with having a baby around. As the day wore on, Angel continued to watch, as Michael doted on his niece and never seemed to want to let her go. The complete love he felt for his niece was obvious. The tender way he watched the baby as she fell asleep in his arms, and as he continued to hold her, every so often gazing down to look at her in awe and wonder, were Angel's emotional undoing. She felt her heart shifting and drifting away, as if the tethers that bound it to her body had loosened. Her heart began to slowly drift to Michael.

The instant Angel felt that happen, she sat frozen to the spot, suddenly unaware of the conversation going on. All she could hear was the sound of blood rushing in her ears, as panic began to well up inside her. She couldn't focus on Michael and Abby, and thankfully they were having a conversation about their brother, that didn't need any contribution from Angel.



[Oh god, NO!] Angel thought desperately. Despite herself, she realized that she had fallen in love with Michael. She couldn't pinpoint when, but it was seeing Michael with Brenna that had made her recognize her feelings.

As the rest of the afternoon wore on, Angel somehow managed to participate in the conversation and she believed that she came across as if nothing was wrong. Inside, Angel was in turmoil, trying desperately to figure out what she could do about her feelings for Michael. By the time Abby had left, with a big hug and a 'It was lovely to meet you Angel, and I hope to see you again soon,' Angel had come up with a plan to prevent anything coming of her feelings for Michael.

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Angel cleared her throat and continued with her story. "The day after Abby left, I turned on Michael. I became a real bitch toward him. I can't even remember what things I said to him, but they were horrible and many times I could see Michael looking at me, hurt in his eyes, as he wondered what he had done to make me turn on him. What he didn't know was that it was my own fear of what could happen that made me behave the way I did." Angel let out a long sad sigh.

"One shouldn't be afraid of loving someone, but in the past I have learned that, for me at least, to do so is to cause a lot more pain than good. People get hurt as a result of my feelings. This time, however, I was determined to resist my own heart. But I couldn't do it alone..." Angel looked at Gideon for a moment, before continuing. "You want to know why I treated Michael so badly, Matthew?"

Gideon felt himself nodding, still not saying a word.

Angel's voice was filled with pain and regret as she said. "Because I believed if I could make Michael hate me, then my loving him wouldn't mean anything. It was only later that I discovered, nothing I could do would make Michael hate me..."

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### The Hour of Love's Surrender

Angel watched with fire in her eyes as Michael slowly got out of the car. He seemed nonplussed by the fact that Angel had just spent the better part of two hours giving him hell for the way he had been driving on the way back from her first day of the New Year's shooting at the San Diego location, even though Michael had been driving perfectly. Angel had been doing her best to stir Michael's temper. [Beginning to think he doesn't have one,] thought Angel, with irritation. Her plan to get rid of Michael, by fighting with him so much that he hated her and left, just wasn't working. [Cool as a goddamned cucumber!] It was that fact that really had Angel's temper at boiling point. How could her plan work if she couldn't bait Michael?

Angel was just about to launch another attack, when movement to her right distracted her. At the same time, she saw Michael stiffen. Both of them turned, to see Jacob Stiller, a paparazzi for The National Enquirer, stepping out from behind some bushes, his camera already in place as he moved closer to Angel, snapping picture after picture of her.

"That's close enough."

Angel turned and watched Michael, as he moved around the car and advanced towards Stiller. If the photographer had had two brain cells to rub together, he may have realized that he was heading for trouble, but he lowered his camera and looked at Michael, saying boldly, "I'll get as close as I want. This is a free country..."

Michael's jaw set hard as he loomed over the photographer, at least a head and a half shorter than him. "This may be a free country, but you're on private property. That's trespassing. So you better leave before I have you arrested, or--my personal favorite--toss your sorry ass into the middle of the road, so you can do your impression of road kill."

"Michael, don't..." Angel glanced over at Stiller. "He's not worth it. Let's just go inside." Angel walked up to Michael and took hold of his arm to lead him away.

"Yeah, bodyguard, follow your mistress inside. Who knows? You might get lucky." Angel gasped at Stiller's snide insinuation. She felt her hackles rising at the dirty smile on his face.

Michael's voice was controlled, as he pulled his arm free of Angel's hold and responded. "You have two choices, Stiller. One, you can leave right now on your own two feet, or two, I can help you leave." Angel had moved just in time to see Michael's lips curl into a cold, threatening smile.

Any rational, sane person would have backed off the instant they saw a smile like that, but not Stiller. He raised his head and laughed in Michael's face. "Fuck you, Healy. I came here to do a job and I ain't leaving until I'm good and ready!" With that he stepped back and once again raised his camera, ready to take more pictures of Angel.

It was obvious to Angel that Michael wasn't going to go inside and just leave the bastard standing there, but she wanted to do just that. She wanted to call the police to come and arrest Stiller for trespass, but she wasn't given the chance.

What happened next was so quick that Angel was barely able to register it. Michael's arm reached out to grab the camera. Stiller may have been shorter than Michael, but he was quick. He lashed out with the hand holding the camera and Angel watched in horror as he swung it upwards and hit Michael on the side of his head. Michael dropped like a stone to the ground. Blood was streaming down the side of his face from a deep gash over his left eye, as he lay unconscious in the driveway.

Fury flooded Angel's senses and she didn't stop to consider her actions, or the consequences. She moved up to Stiller, and just as she had done years before when she had punched Gideon, she reinforced her fist with her telekinetic ability. The right-hook sent Stiller crashing to the ground, groaning in pain and cradling his already bruising jaw in his hand. He had lost hold of his camera, which fell to the ground and broke apart on impact.

Angel moved forward to where Stiller was lying and knelt, with one knee pressing into his chest. He cried out and looked up at Angel, his expression furious "You bitch! You hit..." Angel pressed down on his chest with her knee, causing him to grunt and gasp as she forced the air out of his lungs.

"I could crush you like the bug you are, Stiller. I wouldn't be calling anyone names if I were

you." Angel's voice was softly threatening. Stiller started to struggle to speak. Angel lashed out and slapped him hard across his face.

"I don't have time to play nice with you, Stiller." To make her point, Angel dug her knee into him again. By now, his eyes were watering with pain and the arrogant expression had been wiped from his face. "How about we make a deal?" Angel waited for Stiller to respond. When he hesitated for too long, she pressed her knee down again.

Stiller's voice was gruff as he spoke, quickly. "OK, OK. Just lighten up on the knee before you break my ribs!" Angel lifted her knee slightly, just enough to give him some relief. She was silently grateful that he was in too much pain to consider using his hands and arms, which lay free by his sides, to throw her off. It saved her revealing her telekinetic abilities by keeping him pinned down.

Angel focused her attention back to the problem at hand. "Good boy. Now, I don't want any trouble and neither do you." Angel leaned forward, resting her arms on Stiller's chest, bringing her face within inches of his. Her eyes looked straight into his as she said in a low, cold voice, "I know you would just love to print a story about me having hit you, pegging me as the big bad actress and you as the poor 'reporter' earning an honest living. There are two reasons why you aren't going to do that. You want to know what those reasons are, Stiller?" Angel cocked her head slightly and waited for him to nod.

When he did, Angel smiled and continued slowly, "First, I know all about men like you. Macho jerks who would rather die than admit that a mere woman had just knocked the crap out of them. Am I right or am I right?" Angel watched as Stiller swallowed involuntarily. [Exactly as I thought]

"Second--and pay close attention, Mr. Stiller, because this one is the real reason you won't release this story. You were trespassing on private property. You attacked and injured my bodyguard. That's called assault and battery." Angel paused dramatically, making sure she had Stiller's undivided attention.

"Those are both serious crimes. Now believe me, Mr. Stiller, if what happened here today ever comes out, you'll live to regret it--in jail." Angel held Stiller's eyes with hers until she could see them flicker with uncertainty and fear, as he realized Angel meant it.

"So the deal is, you keep your mouth shut and stay away from me and you get to remain a free man." Angel smiled coldly and continued, "Do we have a deal?" She watched with satisfaction, as Stiller swallowed and finally nodded.

Angel smiled, "Good. Then we'll forget this ever happened and everyone will go their separate ways." She stood up and glanced over at Michael, who was groaning as he began to regain consciousness. Angel turned back to look down at Stiller who was still lying on the ground. "Now, I suggest you leave and quickly, before I change my mind and have you arrested anyway." Angel's lip curled cruelly, to impress on him that she would enjoy doing it. She watched as Stiller, although in pain, stood up quickly. He glanced around for his camera. When he saw where the remains were lying, he started to make a move towards it.

"You won't be needing that!" Barked Angel. Her patience was diminishing quickly. Michael was close to being fully awake and she wanted Stiller gone. The photographer froze and looked over

at Angel. Seeing the expression on her face was enough to set him moving. Angel watched as he all but ran past her, over the road to where he had parked his car. She didn't move until she'd watched him climb in and speed away.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Angel ran over to where Michael was lying. As she knelt beside him, Michael opened his eyes. He groaned and raised a shaky hand to the cut over his eye, going straight through his eyebrow. Angel put her arm around his shoulders to help him, as he struggled to sit up.

"Sonofabitch!" Michael cursed loudly, and winced as his fingers touched the gash. He looked around. "Where'd the bastard go?"

"He ran off." Angel hoped that the half-truth would be enough.

She was relieved when Michael grunted, "Yellow-bellied sack of..."

Angel cut him off before he could complete what she knew was going to be a colorful bit of cursing. "Forget him. He's gone and I get the feeling he won't be back. Now let's get you inside, so I can take a look at that gash." Michael opened his mouth to protest, clearly wanting more of an explanation. [That's going to have to wait!]

Angel snapped, "Don't argue with me, Michael. I don't want you bleeding all over my driveway. We've been lucky so far that there have been no passers-by to witness what's been going on. We just got rid of one paparazzi, I don't want a hundred more coming around to find out what happened here." Shifting her position, Angel lifted Michael's arm and draped it over her shoulder. She stood up, not giving Michael much choice but to stand up with her and let her take him inside.

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"I swear you are hurting me on purpose!" Michael's accusing voice drew Angel's attention from cleaning the cut above his eye. Dropping her hand, she looked at him, ready to argue, but the fight left her at the sight of his obvious pain.

Angel sighed, "I did offer to give you a shot of something to numb the area, so it wouldn't hurt. You declined."

"Well, that was before I realized it would hurt so damned much!" Michael said, petulantly. Angel suddenly felt a bubble of laughter welling up, as he all but pouted at her.

She pushed the laughter down and cleared her throat. "I'm sorry, Michael. I know it must hurt." Turning, Angel rummaged in her medical bag, a remnant from her days in Medbay on the Excalibur. She pulled out a hypo, which contained a mild local anesthetic. Of course, she wouldn't have to fix Michael up this way, if she hadn't left her small, personal regenerator in her trailer. [Oh well, it'll have to be done the 'old fashioned' way.] She held out the hypo and asked, gently, "How about reconsidering?"

Michael nodded enthusiastically. Angel had to suppress a grin as she leaned forward. Her face was inches away from his and she felt an unexpected jolt to her senses at his closeness. Ignoring it, she spoke quickly. "This will hurt a little, but after five minutes the area will be pain free and I can finish patching you up." Before he could say anything, she inserted the

hypo and released the plunger, injecting the anesthetic into the affected area. Angel straightened up and shook her head at Michael, as he cursed loudly at the pain.

"Such language," she said, softening her reproach with a smile, to show him that she was teasing him.

Michael gave her a rueful grin and cleared his throat. "I'm sorry, Angel. I just don't like pain much."

Angel laughed softly and sat down on the coffee table in front of him, waiting for the anesthetic to kick in. "That's OK. I understand."

She felt all the tension between them drain away. Where even half an hour before Angel would have made sure that it had remained, she was now happy to let it abate.

"You want to tell me what happened while I was out for the count?" Michael's voice interrupted Angel's introspection.

There was no reason to lie, so she quickly explained what had happened with Stiller while he had been unconscious. Michael roared with laughter and looked at Angel in amazement when she had finished explaining. "You actually decked him?"

Angel snorted. "He pissed me off, and I wasn't about to let him get away with beating up my bodyguard."

She quirked an eyebrow as Michael almost choked with laughter, saying, "Incredible. That has to be a first. The Client beating someone up for hurting the bodyguard." Finally, he managed to stop laughing, and frowned slightly. "But are you sure about Stiller not printing anything? 'Actress Punches Reporter.' That's one hell of a headline. Scum like that will risk a lot for a good story."

"I'm sure. I don't think Stiller likes the idea of going to jail. Besides that, I know that the Enquirer, although a gossip rag, doesn't much like having its reporters arrested for hassling people. It has a policy that if you're arrested once you get a second chance. Do it a second time and you're fired." Angel broke into a malicious grin. "I know for a fact that Stiller has already been to jail once for trespassing. Trust me, he won't be doing this story and he won't be back here either."

Michael chuckled. "Is that what you threatened him with?"

Angel shook her head. "Nope. I just threatened him with arrest, which clearly was enough, since he's no doubt very aware of the Enquirer's policy. I doubt he wants a repeat visit to jail." Angel grinned with satisfaction.

"Remind me to never seriously piss you off," Michael said, with a smile.

"Believe me, if I'm ever seriously pissed off at you, the only reminder you'll get is a right hook." Angel grinned at Michael as he laughed. She stood up suddenly, feeling guilty for how she had behaved toward him during the past few days. She knew if they continued talking, the conversation could lead to her behavior being brought up and the mood would become strained.

"The anesthetic must have kicked in by now." Angel hoped Michael didn't notice how abruptly she had switched topics. When she looked into his eyes, for a moment she saw a flicker of questioning, but then he blinked, and shifted gear with her. [Thank you!]

Michael touched the gash tentatively and broke into a grin saying, "Can't feel a thing."

"You are just a big baby when it comes to pain, aren't you?" Michael nodded. "Well then, if you're no longer in pain, let's get you fixed up." Angel said, with a chuckle.

Twenty minutes later, she applied the last gauze strip across his cut and stood back. "There, all done. Hmmm, at least you didn't need stitches, but I'm afraid it will probably still leave a scar."

Michael shrugged, and gave Angel a lop-sided grin. "People say scars add character."

"I've heard that, too. And god knows, you need more character." Angel responded with a smirk.

Michael retorted. "Smart ass!" Angel stuck her tongue out at him, causing him to laugh, then for a moment he became more serious. "Thank you, Angel."

Angel smiled and inclined her head. "You're welcome." She remained standing and asked, "So how does it feel now?" She waited and watched as Michael wiggled his eyebrows a few times, testing how the area above it felt. He clearly regretted the movement. Angel bit her lip. "I'm afraid it will hurt for a few days." Michael scowled slightly. Angel's heart turned, at the little injured boy look he gave her. "Aww, poor boy. Let me kiss it better."

She didn't stop to think, as she impulsively leaned forward and lightly kissed Michael above the eye. As Angel began to straighten, she felt his hand snake around her neck, stopping her. Then before she could think about what was happening, Michael's lips were claiming hers in a soft kiss. Angel's heart and stomach jolted at the physical contact and her body started to heat all over, building into a raging fire as his tongue slipped between her lips into the warm haven of her mouth, entwining his tongue with hers. The kiss rapidly became more passionate as Angel gave into it, relishing and needing it, for a moment feeding the love she felt for him.

Angel could hear herself moan as Michael's free hand came around her waist and pulled her down onto the sofa with him. She gasped against his mouth, as his hand moved between them, gently fondling her breast. She lay against him as he deepened the kiss, capturing her mouth like a prisoner. In that kiss alone, Angel realized what Michael felt for her as clearly as if he had spoken the words out loud. That realization wrenched her violently back to her senses. She tore her mouth away from his and pulled herself free from his hold. Her heart was hammering in her chest as she stood and screamed at him in anguish.

"NO!"

Then turning, Angel fled from Michael and her failure to make him hate her.

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Michael sat for a while, staring after Angel. He heard the door to her bedroom slamming shut. For the past few days, he had been aware of what Angel was trying to do. Well, he'd be damned if he'd let her do it. Michael had very good instincts. Instincts he trusted and never

ignored, and he knew in his gut that Angel was in love with him. But for some reason she was so afraid of that, she was pushing him away. Michael didn't fall in love easily, but he had fallen hard for Angel. That is why he had stayed and taken the abuse she was dishing out.

He didn't know why Angel was so afraid of loving him. He had his suspicions--at some time during her life she must have been terribly hurt and as a result she held love at arms length. Michael sighed and tried to rein in his temper, which he had been holding back for so long. But he couldn't any more. He loved her and he knew that she loved him. He wasn't going to let her run away anymore!

Michael sprung up out of his seat and headed for Angel's bedroom. In the back of his mind, a voice told him not to push things in haste, or while he was upset, but he told that voice to go to hell. Too much time had been wasted already.

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Angel stood by the large bay window that looked out over the beach. Her heart was racing so much, she felt it would burst out of her chest. Raising a shaky hand, she brushed back her hair and closed her eyes, trying to rein in her runaway emotions. "Oh gods," she whispered, desperately. [What am I going to do?]

The sound of her door bursting open and slamming back against the wall startled Angel so much that she screamed. Whirling around, she found Michael standing in the doorway. She could see the fire blazing in his eyes as he looked at her.

"Who the hell do you think you are? Get out! I don't want you here! Go away!" Angel, even to her own ears, sounded like a hysterical child.

Wordlessly, Michael moved inside and shook his head. "I'm not going anywhere." Angel backed away as he came closer to her, locking his eyes with hers. "I'm not leaving, because I know that's not what you really want," he said softly.

Angel shook her head vehemently. "Yes it is! I want you out of my sight! You mean nothing to me! You're just a stupid bodyguard who has outlived his usefulness. I hate you and I want you to get the hell out of my life!"

Michael's voice was confident as he spoke calmly. "No, Angel. You don't hate me."

"Yes I do! What's wrong with you? Don't you understand English? I don't want you here! God! Why won't you just go away?" Angel's voice cracked with emotion and tears of frustration stung her eyes.

Michael sighed softly. "Because you love me and because I'm in love with you."

Angel had known it when Michael had kissed her, but she couldn't bear to hear him say the words so earnestly, leaving no doubt in her mind that he was telling her the truth. She knew she had to stop this. Angel closed her eyes. An idea started to materialize in her mind and she reached out and grabbed hold of it. [That will make him leave!] She thought, suddenly calm. [The truth will set you free.]

Angel opened her eyes. Her tone strained, yet calm, as she finally spoke. "How can you love me?"

You don't even know me!"

Michael shook his head. "I do know you, Angel..."

She cut him off with a cold laugh. "You know nothing about me!" Angel shook her head as Michael attempted to say something. "No! I am not who you think I am. Believe me, if you knew the person I really am--you would hate me!" She turned from him and sat down on the edge of her bed.

"I could never hate you, Angel." Angel looked up into Michael's eyes. She could see that he really believed that. And for a moment she hated what she was doing to him, but she had to save herself and him.

No one, except for her agent and her family, knew of her past, but now she had to tell Michael everything, in all its glorious painful detail. If he knew what she had done in the past, things that had hurt people, things that had caused lives to be lost, he would change his mind. He would hate her. Angel felt her heart breaking at the thought of really getting what she had been trying to achieve for the past several days, but she would much rather have her heart broken by Michael's hatred of her, than live with the consequences of what would happen if she let herself love him.

Angel laughed dryly. "Care to place a bet on that?"

Michael frowned. "What are you talking about?"

Angel could hear the frustration in his voice. She sighed, "The truth, Michael. The truth about me." She indicated the chair by the wall opposite her bed. "Please sit. I have a long, ugly story to tell and I'd much rather you didn't hover over me while I tell it." Without argument or question, Michael sat in the chair.

Before Angel could continue, Michael leaned forward and spoke firmly. "You want so badly to make me hate you, Angel? Well fine, go ahead; give it your best shot. But..." He paused and looked at her intently before he continued, "I'm telling you now, it's a waste of time. Nothing you say will make me hate you."

Angel laughed dryly and said sarcastically, "How nice to be so confident when you haven't got a clue about me. But you will..."

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Gideon watched as Angel turned her gaze and looked at him. "I told him everything, Matt. Who I really was and where I came from. I told him about Eriadne. About me being a telekinetic and the Vorlons genetically altering me. About what happened when the Excalibur, and you, arrived on Eriadne and what followed. What I did bringing Lucas out of the Apocalypse Box and the consequences of my selfishness." Angel paused and rubbed her face with her hand before continuing.

"I told him about Dureena, and the death of her baby, Lucas' capture, and my escape from Eriadne. I told him about my time on Mars, my becoming a thief to survive and only just doing that. I told him about the trial that followed my arrest."



Angel took a deep breath and went on. "I spanned an entire seven years, including what took place on Centauri Prime, what my stupidity had contributed to--almost causing all of us to be killed. And I told him about Jack, about how I threw away my last chance at love." She swallowed hard before continuing, "You want to know what he said after I told him all that?"

Gideon knew what must have followed, but nonetheless he said, "Tell me."

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Angel finished telling her story and looked at Michael questioningly. "So? I'm not such an 'Angel' after all, am I?" She forced coolness and sarcasm into her tone, belying what she felt inside. Michael remained unmoving, his expression unreadable. Inside, Angel's heart screamed 'Please don't hate me!' Well, her head was shouting back, 'It's better if he does!' But was it? She wondered if she really could bear the heartbreak of being hated by the man she loved. [Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea,] she thought, sadly.

Finally, after a long silence, Michael stood up. Instead of walking out, as Angel had thought he would, Michael walked up to her and knelt down on the floor in front of her. Angel jerked slightly, as he took hold of her hand. Instead of seeing hate reflected in his eyes as he looked up at her, she saw love. [Oh god!]

Michael smiled at her gently. "Hate you? You think that all those things in your past would make me hate you?" He shook his head. "No, Angel. That's not enough to make me hate you. In fact, if possible, I love you even more."

Angel felt her panic returning in force. Michael was looking at her so honestly, she knew he wasn't lying to her. He continued, "People make mistakes, Angel. They do stupid things sometimes, but it doesn't make them bad."

Angel opened her mouth to say something, but Michael lifted his other hand and placed a finger over her lips silencing her. "No, it's my turn to talk, and you're going to listen," he said, firmly. When he saw that she wasn't going to argue, he continued, "So you've done things in the past that caused other people to be hurt? Well, as far as I can tell, you did nothing intentionally. You made some wrong choices and yes, some of those resulted in people being hurt, but so were you. And you're still hurting, because to this day you hold onto guilt, and you try to use what you did against yourself."

Michael paused as he stroked the back of her hand with his thumb. "Don't you think you deserve to be loved, Angel? Is that why you feel you had to tell me about all the bad things in your past? To make me hate you?"

Angel turned her face away, but he was determined that she should explain. She felt his free hand reach up and hook under her chin, forcing her to look back at him.

"Don't turn away, dammit! You're desperately trying to get rid of me, and I have a right to know why you're running away from loving me." Angel jumped at the angry tone that had crept into Michael's voice. Part of her couldn't blame him, but the other part, the part that was afraid and panic-stricken, snapped. She jumped up and pushed past him. He stood just in time to stop himself being knocked to the floor.

"You want to know why, Michael?" she yelled. "I'll tell you why I am running from loving you!" Angel's emotions had built to explosive proportions, and like a volcano, she erupted. "Because every time I have loved, or wanted a man, something awful has happened! People have been hurt or killed when I gave into my feelings. I stop thinking and bang, I plunge everyone around me into a nightmare! Afraid of love? You're damned right I am!"

Angel knew she was out of control, but she couldn't stop. "And because of how much I love you, I'm terrified of what the consequences would be. It's too dangerous for me to love, or to be loved! Don't you see? I'm not meant for love with a happy ever after!" A gut-wrenching sob tore loose from Angel's chest and she swung away from Michael, turning her back on him, as her whole body shook uncontrollably. She had held onto feeling that way about love for so long, she had never told anyone, not even her sisters or Luke, her confidante. Now that she had voiced her feelings so loudly, she felt shaky and inexplicably drained. Her tone was tired and sad, as she said to the silent man behind her, "Please, just go. It's safer this way."

"No, Angel," said Michael, softly. Angel turned around just as he came to her. She didn't back away from him as he placed his hands on her upper arms and looked down at her gently. "Don't deny yourself happiness because of fear. Love didn't cause those bad things to happen, Angel."

Angel opened her mouth to argue, but Michael shook his head, cutting her off. "No, it didn't. You want to know what I think, Angel? It's just an excuse--albeit one you believe--but it's just a cover up for the real reason you are running from love. You've been so hurt by it, that you'll make up and believe any excuse for resisting it. Letting yourself deny what you really want because to you it feels like a better option than being hurt. But it never is, Angel. Yes, there is a risk of being badly hurt when you open your heart to someone..." Michael paused to give her a warm smile that held all the promise in the world. "But, Angel, love is worth the risk, because when you love the right person it can never be wrong."



Michael lifted his hand and cupped Angel's face. "Let me be the one to show you that, Angel. Let me love you and let me show you that it's safe to love me back."

At those words, the walls of defense that Angel had built around herself began to crumble. Michael had touched on some truths that until that day, she hadn't even realized herself. But as she stood looking up at him, she knew he was right about the real reasons for her resisting love. Not the fear of something bad happening but the fear of being hurt again. As Michael gazed down at her lovingly, Angel couldn't fight her love for him anymore, but that didn't mean she still wasn't afraid.

"I'm scared." she whispered.

"I know you are, sweetheart, but let me take that fear away. Let me show you that you deserve to be loved. Let me give you your happy ever after." Michael said, as he drew Angel into his arms and held her tightly against him. After a while, he pushed her away slightly, so that he could claim her mouth in a tender, passionate kiss. The last walls of resistance crashed to the ground, as Angel finally gave in to her heart.

She put her arms around Michael's neck as he gently lifted her into his arms and carried her to the bed. Releasing her mouth, he laid her down gently and sat beside her.

"I love you, Angel."

Angel's breath caught in her throat and all she could do was reach up to pull his head close, so she could whisper against his mouth. "I love you too, Michael Healy." Then pulling his head down, she kissed him.

Wordlessly their hands moved freely as they began to undress each other. Then slowly, tenderly, they began to make love, until they were completely and blissfully lost in each other.

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Gideon sat, staring out to sea, waiting for Angel to go on. He knew that she was thinking back on the brief time she'd had with Michael, and Gideon didn't want to disturb her memories. It was all she had of Michael. Gideon sighed and cast his mind back five months, his memories of a particular day crystal clear.

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### A Day of Great Joy

"Have I ever told you what a sexy neck you have?" Gideon leaned forward and kissed the nape of his wife's neck. She had arranged her thick, blonde hair into an intricate pile of curls on top of her head.

Deborah chuckled, a deep, throaty laugh that always excited him. "Once or twice."

Gideon moved his hands around her waist, pulling her back against his chest, cupping her breasts in his hands. Deborah turned in his arms and grinned at him. "If you leave hot, sweaty finger marks on this dress, Angel will kill you. She had enough difficulty persuading me to wear it. You're supposed to be helping me get into it, not stripping me out of it. Zip me up, will you?"

Gideon kissed her quickly, and pulled the zipper up the back of her dark blue velvet dress. "Yes. Ma'am. It's nice to see you in something that's not black, for once."

Deborah grinned, then kissed his bare chest where his shirt remained open. Running her fingers lightly through the hairs on his chest, she murmured, "It's a shame I have to help you dress, though. I'd much rather help you undress."

Gideon caught her hands and kissed them gently, giving her a sexy smile as he whispered,

"Later. For now, can you get these damned studs fastened?" He glared down at the sapphire studs he'd been trying to get through his dress shirt, telling himself that he should be grateful Angel hadn't insisted he wore dress uniform. At least the midnight-blue under-collar of his shirt removed the need for him to wear the bow tie that was still a traditional part of this outfit.

Having got the studs fastened, Deborah turned and picked up his vest from the bed, then helped him into it. The vest was also of midnight blue, a perfect match for the under-collar of his shirt and his wife's velvet dress. Gideon pulled on the jacket of his tuxedo then turned to look at his reflection in the mirror. [I look like a penguin,] he sighed to himself.

Deborah stood behind him and smiled over his shoulder, catching his eyes in the mirror. "Cute. Have I ever told you how sexy you look in a tux?"

Gideon felt her hand as she patted his butt and turned quickly, grabbing her and kissing her quick and hard. "Keep your hands to yourself, or I'll end up limping down the aisle, and Angel will be pissed with both of us." He pushed Deborah away from him, taking in the long, dark velvet dress she wore, fitted closely to her spectacular figure, but not clinging.

Deborah smiled up at him. "We'd better go. Angel will be ready and waiting."

They left their bedroom together and walked along the landing. Deborah paused at the top of the stairs and smiled at her husband again. "You go get her. I'll get the flowers."

Gideon smiled and lifted Deborah's left hand to his lips, kissing the finger on which she wore her wedding ring, knowing that she was deliberately giving him and Angel a last few moments alone together. He sometimes wondered whether it would be possible to love anyone more than he loved his wife, and was happy that he never had to find the words to describe that love to her. Being an empath, when she used her powers, even though they had been weakened when Galen had tried to kill her, Deborah knew exactly how he felt about her.

As he walked along the landing to the room where Angel waited, Gideon glanced out of a window and saw the snow lying on the ground outside. It was a startling contrast to the weather they had experienced in California only two weeks before, when he, Deborah, Marcus and Mattie had joined Angel at her home for New Year. Michael had been there too, in the background. Angel had ignored him for most of the time and been icily polite to him otherwise. Gideon had been surprised that she hadn't dismissed Michael after the first week's trial, and had expressed his confusion to Deborah in the privacy of their room.

Deborah had smiled at him, mischievously. "Don't be silly, Matthew. Of course she won't fire him. They're head over heels in love with each other."

Gideon smiled to himself, as he remembered telling Deborah that she was nuts. He should have known better than to question her knowledge of other people's feelings. Only a week later, Angel had called her sister, telling Deborah that she and Michael wanted to get married. Gideon still wasn't sure how they had managed to get all the arrangements made in a week, but here they were, in mid-January, holding the wedding in the house he and Deborah owned in England. Their guests were waiting down in the hallway below, and he was about to escort Angel down there, to give her away to another man. Gideon knocked gently on the door to Angel's room, calling her name softly, turning the handle as he heard her say, "Come in, Matt."



The view that met Gideon's eyes as he entered the room took his breath away. Angel was standing in front of a full length mirror, but she turned toward him as he entered, her excited smile making her look more beautiful than he had ever seen her. His eyes swept from the top of her head, down over her almost bare shoulders, to the cleavage that her dress so clearly displayed. After a few seconds, Gideon realized that he was staring at Angel's breasts, [Again!] and managed to drag his eyes down the tight red bodice of her dress, to the full white skirt that swirled around her legs, split to show a red silk underskirt.

"Will I do?"

Gideon looked into Angel's smiling face as she asked his opinion. "You've never looked more beautiful, Angel. Michael is a very lucky man." He smiled, pushing down a surge of jealousy that Angel was about to commit herself to another man. He told himself that he should be happy for her, happy that she had at last found someone to love, a good man who would love her and take care of her. But it was hard. The nasty little green-eyed monster gnawed away at him, but he pushed it down ruthlessly, as he put his hand in his pocket, pulling out a small velvet box.

"This is a little gift from Deborah and me. Something new. Turn around." Gideon's breath caught in his throat as Angel turned, showing that the bodice of her dress was laced behind, displaying more of her bare back than Gideon could easily cope with at that moment. He quickly removed the delicate white-gold chain from the box, and moving Angel's hair to one side, fastened it around her neck. Suspended from the chain was a small diamond pendant, which rested in the hollow of her throat, just in the place where Gideon longed to press his lips. He looked over her shoulder at her reflection in the mirror, and smiled when he saw Angel lift her hand to touch the pendant.

She whispered, "It's beautiful, Matt. Thank you."

Gideon couldn't stop himself. He leaned forward and gently kissed Angel's bare shoulder, well aware that this was the last time he would ever kiss her as anything but a brother.

She turned and looked up at him, smiling softly. "And thank you for agreeing to give me away. It means a lot to me, you know."

Gideon took her hand and lifted it to his mouth, murmuring, "Giving you to another man is the hardest thing I've ever done, Angel. You know that I'll always love you; that a part of my heart will always belong to you. But Michael can give you all of his heart, all his love. He'll be completely yours, body and soul."

Angel's face flickered with pain for a moment, and Gideon wondered what he'd said to cause such a reaction, but then she smiled at him, and stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek, saying, "Our guests will be waiting. Let's go."

Gideon held out his left arm and Angel rested her right hand on his forearm. They left the room together and walked to the top of the stairs, where Deborah waited patiently. She handed Angel a small bouquet of white orchids, then stepped behind them wordlessly, following them down the wide stairway.

Everyone gathered below looked up, as the music started playing, and Gideon escorted Angel down the stairs. On the right of the hallway, Alwyn stood with Sarah and their son Jaysen, now nearly four, who was standing between them. Alwyn had promised to record the ceremony for them, although Gideon couldn't see any signs of equipment. He told himself to be grateful that Ishtar wasn't hovering overhead with a camera clutched in her claws. Alwyn held Mattie in his arms, while Sarah rested her hand on Marcus' shoulder, as Gideon's son glowered up at his father and aunt. Gideon suppressed a smile. Marcus was not happy about his favorite aunt getting married. Gideon's own jealousy was nothing compared to that of his son.

On the other side of the hallway, Max Eilerson stood with Ilas, and their son, Vya, who looked much older than his five years. If Gideon had been in charge of all the arrangements, Eilerson's name would not have been on the guest list, but he'd gritted his teeth and promised Deborah that he'd behave. Having the man in his home made Gideon's flesh crawl, but he distracted himself by looking at the person standing on the other side of Max. Dureena stood holding the hand of her three year old daughter, Ilori.

Gideon was glad that Ilas at least had been able to attend her sister's wedding, even if she had brought Max with her. Sadly, Lily, John and Luke were too far from Earth to get back, too far out and on too important a mission to be able to return to Earth in any reasonable amount of time.

At the far end of the hallway, Michael Healy and his older brother Ben stood waiting in front of the minister. Gideon couldn't help thinking that Michael looked a damn sight better in his tux than he did, with shirt and vest identical to Gideon's. Fortunately, Gideon's old Master of Arms, Sergeant Ben Healy, looked like a sack of potatoes in his tux, a fact that raised Gideon's morale considerably.

Looking down at the beautiful woman walking by his side, Gideon could almost feel her

vibrating with excitement. There was no doubt that Angel was passionately in love with Michael. Gideon sighed as he passed Angel into the care of another man.

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Gideon pulled his thoughts back to the present and turned to look at Angel, sitting next to him on the beach. She still had her knees hugged to her chest and was staring out to sea, lost in thought. Her hair fell in wispy curls around her face, drawing attention to her cheekbones, which stood out more clearly than they had a week before. Angel had lost weight since Michael's death, not eating enough, drinking too much, and it showed in the dark circles under her eyes and the gauntness of her face. But to Gideon she was still one of the most beautiful women he'd ever met. He raised his hand and gently pushed her hair back behind her ear, softly running his finger along the side of her face.

"Hey. Still with me?" He asked quietly, as Angel turned to look at him. The sadness in her bright blue eyes nearly broke Gideon's heart.

She tried to smile, but her lips trembled as she said, "Just about. I'm hanging on, Matt, but that's all."

Gideon swallowed hard as he smiled back, saying, "That's all we can ask, Angel. Just keep hanging on." He turned his eyes back to the shoreline, watching as a horse and rider galloped along the water's edge.

Hearing Angel sigh, he turned to look at her as she whispered, "Do you remember that day, Matt? The day of the picnic?"

Gideon was plunged back into memories of a day less than two months earlier.

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### Time to Play Ball

Shifting his weight to get more comfortable, Gideon glanced across at Michael Healy, riding alongside him. Michael looked as if he'd been born in the saddle, totally relaxed, at ease with his horse. Somehow, Gideon doubted if Michael's balls felt as if they were being rubbed raw, as his did. The Captain shifted again and smiled as he looked ahead, watching the two horses cantering along the shoreline.

Deborah rode one horse as if she'd been in the saddle every day of her life. She stood upright in the stirrups, urging her horse forward, but not pressing him into a gallop. The gray of the horse's flanks contrasted with Deborah's black pants and t-shirt, and her blonde, tousled hair

flew out behind her like a mane. Gideon shifted in his saddle again. It wasn't his balls that troubled him this time, but something close by. He wondered if the sight of his wife's butt would ever fail to arouse him.

Glancing to her left, Gideon had to admit that Deborah's butt wasn't the only thing worth staring at. Angel also stood up in her stirrups, displaying her beautiful round ass in denim shorts that barely covered her cheeks, a gap showing between the waistband of those shorts and the bottom of her red t-shirt, revealing a broad band of pale, firm skin. Gideon looked over at Michael again and realized that the ex-bodyguard was staring at Angel's butt with much the same appreciation as Gideon felt in watching Deborah.

A shriek of delight pulled Gideon's attention back to the horses cantering in front of them. "Faster, Auntie Angel! Faster!"

Gideon's son, Marcus, was sitting in the saddle in front of his aunt, urging her on, trying to make sure they won the race they were having with his mother. While baby Mattie had stayed at home with her nanny, the Gideons had brought their son out for a special birthday treat, just for him. Marcus had refused the offer of his own pony to ride out to their picnic on the beach. As soon as he saw the coal black stallion that Angel had reserved for herself, the boy had decided it would be much more fun to ride with his aunt. Deborah had reluctantly agreed to this, but had given Angel a stern warning not to go too fast. She may as well have saved her breath. When Angel and Marcus got together, they egged each other on, and inevitably ended up being admonished by Deborah for some wrongdoing or another.

Deborah's laughter floated back to her husband as she called out to her sister and son, "Slow down!"

A chuckle to his right brought Gideon's attention back to the man riding next to him. Michael said quietly, "It doesn't get much better than this, does it?" Gideon leaned his head to one side and looked quizzically at Michael, as he continued, "Beautiful day, beautiful horses, beautiful women and a birthday picnic for your son waiting for us in the next cove. What more could we ask for?"

Gideon smiled. "A cold bottle of beer when we get there would be good. And a pack of ice to apply to my sore butt would be perfect." He shifted uncomfortably again.

Michael laughed. They watched as the women disappeared around a rock outcropping, then talked quietly about beer, horses and ice packs as they rode. Gideon slowed the pace of his horse, not wanting to catch up with the others too quickly. After a few moments riding in companionable silence, he turned to Michael and said quietly, "I don't think I've ever seen Angel happier than she's been these last couple of months. I'd like her to stay that way."

Michael turned to look at him, his eyebrows raised in inquiry. "Or what? Was that a threat, Captain?"

Gideon shook his head. "More of a promise. You know what would happen if you hurt Angel, don't you?" He looked at Michael, his expression serious.

Michael grinned. "Oh yeah. First you would try to kill me." Gideon nodded as Michael went on, "Then your wife would try to kill me, then her other sisters, then the rest of your extended



family. By the time you'd all finished with me, there wouldn't be enough of me left to feed to the fishes. Is that it?"

Gideon nodded. "Pretty much. Angel's been through a lot, she deserves to be happy."

Michael pulled on the reins of his horse, halting it in mid-stride, then swung his leg up to hook around the saddle horn, leaning his elbow on his thigh as he looked across at Gideon, who had reined in next to him. The smile had disappeared from Michael's face and his voice was low and dangerous as he said, "Angel means more to me than anyone or anything. I love her more than I ever thought it possible to love someone. I will never, ever hurt her and I'll never leave her. You'd better believe that, Matt. Because if you don't, then to hell with you."

He swung his leg back round and started to move his horse on. Gideon leaned forward and grabbed the reins, holding Michael back. The Captain nodded, saying quietly, "I believe you. I know you'll take care of her. It's just..." he trailed off, unable to find the right words.

Michael looked at him seriously for a moment, then nodded. "It's just that you love her, too."

Gideon straightened in his saddle, letting go of the reins of Michael's horse. He took a deep breath and said, "Yes," quietly, before carrying on, "And if we don't catch up with them soon, they'll eat all the food and drink all the beer, then we'll have two drunken witches on our hands. I don't even want to think about the damage they could do in that state, so maybe we'd better get going."

Michael laughingly agreed and they set off in pursuit of their wives.

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Demon stood on top of the bluff, looking down onto the beach below. She had become impatient when her husband hadn't returned after an hour and had gone looking for him and her sister, leaving the nanny to look after Mattie. The tall blonde had walked along the pathway that followed the edge of the cliff, scanning the sands below. It was still early and there were few people around, just a scattering of bathers and surfers. Then Demon saw the two figures sitting next to each other on the beach, a few meters back from the water's edge.

Matthew was sitting with his legs bent in front of him, resting his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands as he gazed out to sea. Angel sat next to him, nearly but not quite touching, her arms hugging her legs to her chest, her chin touching her knees, as she too stared at the ocean. They hadn't moved or spoken in the few moments that had passed since Demon arrived, both apparently lost in thought. Demon wondered whether she should join them and get them to come back to the house. [And what good will that do? Will Angel be any happier sitting inside? It doesn't matter where she is right now, she'll still be desperately unhappy.]

Demon's eyes filled with tears at the thought of her sister's grief. Her vision blurred and she rubbed the moisture from her eyes just as Matthew reached out and tucked a curl of hair behind Angel's ear. Demon was too far away to hear what they said to each other, but she could feel Matthew's sadness and love for her little sister.

The tall blonde sighed and started to turn away, deciding to leave them in peace. She just hoped that Matthew could help Angel in some way. Then, the sight of a horse and rider, galloping

through the surf, captured her attention. Demon inhaled sharply as memories of her son's sixth birthday came flooding back to her.

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"But I've never played baseball!" Demon stared at the bat Matthew had placed in her hands.

"Here, I'll show you how." Matthew stood behind her, putting his arms around her to cover her hands with his. Demon pressed her butt into his groin and wiggled it, producing a low groan from her husband. "Stop it!" He moved his head close enough to whisper into her ear, "If you carry on like that, the bat won't be the only thing around here that's long and hard."

Demon chuckled and adjusted her grip on the bat, swinging it as Matthew suggested. She decided that he didn't need to know that she'd played a game called 'rounders' at her English boarding school for years, a game that was almost identical to baseball. After a few moments of unnecessary instruction, Matthew stood back and crouched behind her, calling to Michael, who stood a few meters away, "OK. Pitch her a slow one to start."

Demon smiled to herself. If Matthew wanted to patronize her, she'd soon show him the error of his ways. She took her position, holding the bat high, well aware that Matthew had hunkered down, his face on a level with her butt.

When they'd arrived on the beach, Demon and Angel had stripped down to the bikinis they both wore under their clothes, while the men had stripped off their t-shirts to enjoy the warm April sun. Demon's black bikini consisted of three tiny triangles of material, held in place by thin strings. Angel's bikini was almost identical, but was red. When they had undressed, both men had stared--no, ogled--at their wives. [Anyone would think they'd never seen us naked,] Demon giggled to herself. She and Angel had then both tied their hair back and pulled on baseball caps to shield their eyes from the sun.

The sight of his wife in her tiny black bikini, hair tied back into a ponytail, and cap over her eyes, seemed to get Matthew a little over-excited. Demon couldn't blame him--the sight of him in his tight jeans, and naked from the waist up, was putting her hormones into overdrive. Glancing at Michael, as he got ready to pitch, Demon had to admit that her brother-in-law looked pretty damned good, too. She smiled to herself, remembering that he and Angel had hardly been able to keep their hands off each other earlier, as they'd eaten their picnic. Marcus had got quite upset that his aunt was ignoring him, until Angel had taken the boy for a swim while Matthew, Michael, and Demon had stretched out on the sand, watching the two of them play in the water.

Baseball had been Matthew's idea, and Demon was convinced it was mainly to give him an opportunity for a quick grope. Not that she was complaining. Michael had enthusiastically supported the suggestion and had willingly provided Angel with some very 'hands on' tuition in holding the bat. Demon had noticed that Angel had said nothing about her own experience in 'rounders' either, obviously enjoying the lesson she was receiving from her husband. It was Marcus' protests that had made them actually start playing, Matthew and Michael on one side, Demon, Angel and Marcus on the other.

As the ball left Michael's hand, Demon wiggled her butt right in front of Matthew's eyes, knowing that he'd never be able to keep his eye on the ball. She swung for the ball and missed,

but it went flying past Matthew too, as he froze in place, mesmerized by the movement of his wife's ass.

Michael called out, "Hey! Matt! Focus!"

Matthew shook his head and looked up at Demon, as she looked over her shoulder at him, grinning wickedly. He grumbled, "I was focused. Just not on the ball." He grinned at his wife, saying, "Do that again, and I'll spank your butt until it's as red as Angel's bikini."

Demon grinned back. "Promises, promises." She looked back at Michael, who was preparing to pitch again. Angel and Marcus were standing together, watching proceedings, whispering to each other and giggling. Demon wondered what they were plotting. [Something bad, that's for sure!]

The next pitch was much stronger, and Demon swung for it, hard. Her bat connected with the ball, and lofted it into the air. Demon dropped the bat and started running toward first base, watching the ball as it flew. It seemed to her that its trajectory looked a little peculiar, but she was too busy running on the soft, shifting sand to pay much attention.

The ball hit the sand and Michael scooped it up, throwing it toward Matthew, as Demon got halfway to second base. She was aware that Matthew was running straight toward her, racing across the pitcher's mound to get to second base before her. As the ball left Michael's hand, it stopped dead in mid-air, shot straight up, did a double loop, stopped again then headed back down at twice its original speed, aimed directly at Matthew's head.

Matthew ducked and let the ball sail over his head, but kept running at full pace. The next thing Demon knew, her husband ploughed into her, bowling her over and rolling her in the sand. Finally, he came to rest on top of her, both of them breathing heavily. From the shrieks Demon could hear, it was apparent that Michael had just pounced on Angel in exactly the same way.

Matthew grinned down at her and said, "You cheated."

Demon grinned back and shook her head. "Angel cheated. And since when did baseball involve throwing your opponent to the ground?"

Matthew gave her a long, slow smile as he whispered, "I changed my mind. We're playing football now. You've just been sacked."

Demon laughed and pushed at his shoulders, but Matthew didn't move. He continued to pin her to the ground as she said, "Well, to me that was more like rugby, and the English call it a tackle." She moved her hand down and slid it between their bodies, grabbing his balls and massaging them gently. "And we call this tackle, too. Wedding tackle."

Matthew dropped his head and covered her mouth, kissing her long and hard, sending shivers down Demon's spine and making her nipples stand out. The kiss was interrupted by a loud noise of displeasure.

"Ewww!!! Stop it! It's bad enough when Mummy and Daddy do it!" Marcus stood with his hands on his hips, glaring down at Angel and Michael. They were also lying in the sand, but Angel had somehow flipped Michael onto his back, probably using her telekinetic powers, and

was sitting astride him. They were locked in a passionate embrace and kiss, and didn't seem to have noticed Marcus' outraged protest.

Matthew sighed and called out, "Leave them alone, Marcus! Come over here and we'll go for a swim." He looked back down at his wife as she lay under him, whispering, "The joys of being a parent. We'll finish this later," before pushing himself to his feet and extending a hand to Demon to help her stand.

They left Angel and Michael alone together on the beach, while they took their son to play in the sea in the next cove. When they returned an hour later, Demon sent ahead to Angel, [*We're on our way back, so get yourselves decent!!*] The link between the two sisters had diminished over the years, but there was still enough left to send over short distances. Demon and Matthew talked loudly to each other as they came round the rocks, finding the couple lying together on a towel. Michael lay on his back with Angel clasped closely in his arms, her head on his shoulder, her hair--loose now--falling across his bare chest. The couple looked up and waved at Matthew, Demon and Marcus as they returned, gesturing to the blanket laid out beside them.

In the middle of the blanket was a large cake in the shape of a White Star spaceship, with 'Happy Birthday Marcus' written in icing along the top.

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Demon bit her lip and wiped away more tears, as she came back to the present. In the time she had known Michael, she had come to like him very much. In trying to help Angel through her grief, Demon had not given herself the opportunity to deal with her own sense of loss, her own anger at having a new friend taken away so cruelly. With one last, longing glance at her husband, Demon turned and walked away. She knew that Matthew would bring Angel home as soon as they were both ready.

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Gideon turned to Angel, smiling gently. "I'll never forget that day, Angel. Days as good as that one don't come around very often. When I think of Michael, I'll always think of him on that damned horse. He made me feel like a complete klutz."

He was rewarded by a sad little laugh from Angel, as she straightened and turned toward him, saying, "For a novice rider, you did pretty well with your horse, Matt. Of course, we gave you a nice quiet mare to ride." Her smile turned mischievous, even though still strained.

Gideon laughed, "Oh thanks, that does my ego a world of good." He reached out and ran his thumb gently along Angel's cheekbone, sobering as he said, "I can't imagine how much you must miss him, Angel. He was a good man, a good friend and I miss him, too. We all miss him. He's left a gap in our lives that will never be filled, but somehow we have to go on. I don't know where you're going to find the strength or the courage to do that, but if there's anything that Deborah and I can do to help, you know that we'll always be here for you."

Angel's face broke up as he spoke, and a single tear started to trickle down her cheek. She choked out, "Oh God, Matt! I miss him so much! Why did he leave me? He promised me my happy ever after. He promised me..." Then the floodgates opened and Gideon took Angel into

his arms and held her as she sobbed, screaming her grief and anger at her loss, finally letting go of all the pain she had held so tightly inside.

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### A Storm Tossed Night

Gideon stood with his hands buried deep in the pockets of his leather jacket. He peered into the darkness of the old warehouse. As far as Gideon could tell, the man he was expecting wasn't there yet, but with a Ranger you never could tell.

Three days ago, he had received a message from Marcus Cole, instructing Gideon to meet him at this location. The message was also clear that Gideon was to tell no one about the meeting. [Easier said than done when you're married to a gorgeous empath, who senses your guilt when you're keeping something from her.]

Thankfully, Gideon hadn't had to explain where he was going in the middle of the night because Deborah was away on a book signing tour. For the first time in a long time, Gideon didn't mind so much that Deborah was away again. He frowned, and again searched the darkness for the man he was supposed to be meeting.

"If I didn't know better, I would say you were looking for something."

Gideon spun around at the voice behind him. He turned in time to see Marcus Cole appear from out of the shadows.



"Sonofabitch!" Gideon cursed, as he forced his heart back to where it belonged.

Marcus grinned. "Does your wife know you use language like that, Captain?"

Gideon snorted. "My wife could give both of us a few lessons in swearing." He broke into a grin and held out his hand. Marcus grasped it and they shook hands. "It's good to see you again, Marcus," said Gideon, smiling.

"You too, Matt."

Gideon cleared his throat. "So, are you going to tell me what the cloak and dagger is about?"

Marcus' face became serious. "In a minute, but first I have to ask. Did you tell anyone that you were meeting with me?"

Gideon shook his head. "No one."

Marcus looked at him closely. "Especially not Angel?"

Gideon frowned. Something was going on here and it made his skin feel as if ants were crawling beneath it. [This is not going to be good,] he thought.

"No, not Angel. Nor my wife, which isn't the easiest thing to do, considering she's an empath and knows when I'm hiding things. What's going on, Marcus? What's so important that it requires such secrecy?" Gideon paused, then asked, "Why would it bother you if I told Angel about meeting you?"

Marcus sighed. "Because what I have to tell you has to do with Angel, and I'm not sure she should know this, but I'll let you be the judge of that." Marcus shook his head and added, "It's a shame though. I would love to be able to see her, to see how she's doing" He looked at Gideon for a moment in question.

Gideon wanted Marcus to get on with the reason he was here, but he could tell the Ranger needed to know about Angel. "It's been very hard for her, losing Michael like that. But she's getting through it one day at a time"

"She didn't deserve to lose her husband like that, and Michael Healy was a good man." Marcus sighed, sadly.

Gideon nodded and replied, "No, she didn't, and yes, he was. Marcus, if this has to do with Angel, I think you'd better spit it out."

Marcus nodded. "It's about Michael Healy's killer."

"What?" Asked Gideon, quietly.

Marcus gave Gideon an apologetic smile. "Forgive me Matt, but if you can bear with me--the only place to start this is at the beginning."

Gideon clamped down on his impatience and nodded. "Just as long as you get to the point."

Marcus nodded and began to explain, his voice echoing slightly around the old warehouse. "When I heard about Michael's death I was angry. I only met him that one time, but the circumstances were somewhat..." The Ranger paused, searching for the right word, then gave Gideon a wry smile as he went on, "unique."

Gideon snorted. 'Unique' was a good word for getting arrested and having to be bailed out of jail by their wives.

Marcus sighed and went on. "It's wrong that Angel didn't get the happiness she deserved. I felt compelled to search for the killer. As a Ranger, I have certain resources available, and I used them, calling in a favor here and there to find out whatever I could."

"I already had information on the suspected terrorist group responsible. I worked from that,

using contacts on many worlds to get accurate, reliable information on the group." Marcus looked at Gideon a moment before continuing. "What I found, Matt was that there is no such group, just a name. There were no real members, no leader, in a word, nothing to suggest that they were real."

"What are you talking about?" Gideon didn't like what Marcus was saying or what it was suggesting.

"They don't exist, Matt. Plain and simple, all that exists to do with that group is a name. Created for one purpose and one purpose only--a smoke screen to hide the truth. It took me a while and a lot of favors, but I eventually found the bastard who shot Angel's husband." Marcus paused as Gideon breathed in sharply, then continued. "It took a lot of control not to kill him there and then, but I knew something was going on and I had to find out what. At first he didn't want to talk, but after awhile I managed to get him singing like a canary."

Marcus smiled dangerously, making Gideon aware that beneath that jovial exterior the Ranger exuded, was a very dangerous man. "You're not going to like what I found out, Matt, and I have to admit, now that I'm here, I wonder if I should say any more..." Marcus' voice trailed off.

Gideon shook his head. "You think I'm going to let you stop there?"

Marcus laughed slightly and shook his head. "No, I don't suppose you would." He sighed and continued, "What the shooter told me was that Redway hadn't been the real target. It had just been made to look that way, to throw everyone off the real target." The tone of Marcus' voice turned Gideon's blood cold and suddenly it hit him.

Gideon felt as if someone had just punched him in the gut. His voice was strangled as he said, "Michael. It was Michael Healy, wasn't it?" Gideon shook his head and questioned in frustration. "How? Why?"

"The shooter was informed of Redway and Michael's connection. He was told to send letters threatening Redway's life on behalf of this group. He was informed of the Conference in Washington and told that Redway's people would be concerned about his safety there. And he was told that Redway would call on Michael, an old friend and trusted one time bodyguard, to be there for him."

Marcus sighed. "You see, Matt, everything was cleverly set up so that Michael would be there on that day, so the shooter could kill him, making it look like an assassination attempt on Redway's life when..."

"It was Michael he was after all along." Gideon finished the sentence. He didn't question what Marcus had just told him. The only thing that Gideon didn't know was the why.

As if reading his thoughts, Marcus cut in before Gideon could speak. "You now want to know why?"

Gideon nodded. "Yes."

Marcus was silent for a long time. Something about his silence unnerved Gideon more than he had been in a very long time. Finally, Marcus spoke. "I could give you a long explanation, but I

know if I say just two words, you'll know why and for that matter, who."

Gideon didn't realize he was whispering as he said, "Marcus, tell me."

A name suddenly flashed in Gideon's head and he prayed to whichever gods felt like listening that Marcus didn't say those words. And then Marcus did.

"Lucas Buck."

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Gideon stood staring out of the window. The raging storm outside was nothing compared to the rage going on inside his head. It had been three days since Marcus Cole had revealed who was behind Michael's death. The name kept echoing inside Gideon's brain, fuelling the anger and hate he felt.

[Lucas Buck, Lucas Buck, Lucas fucking Buck!]



Gideon's jaw set hard, aggravating the tension headache he'd had for the last three days. He hadn't thought it possible to hate and loathe Lucas Buck more than he already did, but after Marcus had said that name, the hatred Gideon felt became dark and almost consuming.

Lucas had instigated Michael's murder. Gideon didn't need to have absolute proof of that. He knew full well what Lucas was capable of. Gideon's thoughts drifted through the last few minutes he had spent with Marcus Cole. Marcus had given his word that he would not stop looking until he located Buck. Gideon himself had not given up searching for Lucas in the past few years, but had never been able to locate the bastard. But maybe Marcus would have better luck, using the eyes and ears of the Rangers, which stretched far into known space. If it took him years, he would keep searching. Gideon knew Marcus well enough to know that he would keep his word.

"For Angel, I swear as a Ranger that I will never stop searching." Marcus had pledged it like an oath.

Gideon had asked just one thing of Marcus, that when he did locate Buck, that Marcus should stand aside while Gideon settled the score. That score had started with the death of Dureena's baby. Gideon had made a promise to Dureena years before, that he would make Lucas pay for



killing her unborn child. The Captain always kept his promises and he had made a silent promise to Angel. He would avenge Michael's death. [An eye for an eye.]

Marcus had understood and said he would step aside, but he'd also said he hoped that Gideon would leave him something of Buck so that he could take his turn. Gideon hadn't been able to promise that. If and when he got his hands on Lucas, there wouldn't even be enough left of him to bury.

Gideon closed his eyes as his thoughts drifted to Angel. Marcus had left it up to him to decide whether to reveal what he knew to anyone, especially to Angel. How could he tell Angel that Lucas Buck had her husband killed? Gideon suddenly thought back to when Lucas had saved Angel's life. Angel hadn't believed that Lucas had done it out of love, but had been convinced that he had some nefarious future plans for her.

[Is that why Buck saved her life?] Gideon wondered.

It seemed to make some sick kind of sense. Angel had said many times that one day Lucas would strike out at her, to make her pay for her betrayal of him. Michael's murder seemed to be the perfect, most cruel way to strike back at Angel. [Evil sonofabitch!] Gideon cursed under his breath.

Lucas had obviously been watching and waiting all this time. When he had seen that Angel had fallen in love, had married Michael and was happy, Lucas had struck. What better way to hurt Angel than to take her husband from her? How could Gideon tell Angel that Lucas was responsible for Michael's murder? Gideon sighed. He knew that there was no way he could tell her. Angel was emotionally fragile after losing Michael and Gideon didn't believe that she could cope with that kind of knowledge.

He knew Angel well enough to know that she would blame herself, believing that if it weren't for her, Michael would still be alive. [Ignorance, in this case, is better than knowing,] thought Gideon, even though a part of his conscience challenged him, [Do you really have the right to keep something this big from her?] For now, Gideon believed he did. He had to protect Angel from news that he believed would destroy her

Gideon closed his eyes again, as his thoughts moved on to Deborah. He felt guilty keeping this secret from her, too. He knew that his wife, who had returned the day before from her book signing tour, sensed that something was wrong. Deborah hadn't pushed him to explain what was bothering him, but Gideon knew she was concerned about his dark mood. He felt black, dark hatred surge from the depths of his gut. [Damn you to the depths of hell where you belong, Lucas Buck!]

Gideon ground his teeth as he clamped down on the hatred he was feeling, because along with those feelings came thoughts of what he would do to Lucas. [Not that the bastard doesn't have it coming to him!] he thought, darkly. But in Gideon's mind that would make him no better than Buck. He would enjoy it too much. Yet somehow Gideon knew that he wouldn't hesitate in killing Lucas, no matter how much like Lucas it made him. [As long as he's dead.]

Gideon closed his eyes and sighed as he raised his hands to his temples, massaging them with his fingertips. His headache was getting worse. He jerked slightly and dropped his arms to his sides, his eyes opening when he felt Deborah's arms slide around his waist. She rested her head

gently on his shoulder, as she asked him softly, "Do you want to talk about it, Matthew?"

For a moment, Gideon closed his eyes, then he turned around in Deborah's arms, putting his arms around her waist, drawing her closer to him. He smiled at her, sadly. "I wish I could..." He trailed off, as he saw a flicker of hurt in her eyes. He regretted not being able to tell Deborah about what he had learned. "I just can't right now." When Deborah lowered her eyes to hide her pain, Gideon's anger towards Lucas returned in full force. He pushed it down when he felt his wife stiffen in his arms, knowing that she had sensed his rage.

It hurt when Deborah lifted her head up and looked at him, her hazel eyes shimmering with held back tears. Her voice was husky as she asked, "Matthew, did I do something to make you a..." Gideon cut her words off, as he suddenly pulled her tightly against him and claimed her mouth in a passionate kiss. Finally, after several breathtaking moments, he broke the kiss.

"No, love. You've done nothing. Believe me." He smiled at his wife gently, and let the love he felt for her rise to the surface, where he knew Deborah could feel it. Removing one arm from around Deborah's waist, Gideon lifted his hand to stroke her cheek. "I'm sorry, Deborah. I just can't talk about it right now. It's not you, I promise. One day I might be able to tell you, just not right now." He looked into her eyes. "Can you understand that?"

Deborah nodded slowly. "Yes, I can." Gideon felt her move a hand up his back until it curved around his neck, where she gently stroked at the tension there. Then she leaned forward and kissed him. He opened his mouth beneath her lips and let his tongue come out to meet hers. Suddenly, he found himself crushing her against him, desperate to feel her love for him, to chase away the dark thoughts that had gripped his mind since finding out about Lucas.

Gideon needed to force those thoughts away, at least for one night, before they drove him insane with anger. After several minutes, he broke the kiss to find they were both breathing a little raggedly. He said with a wicked grin, "I've heard that sex is a great cure for a headache."

Deborah chuckled and put her arms around his neck. "Well then, lover, take me to bed and let's see about soothing that pain." Gideon's heart turned at the smile she gave him. He could still see concern for him in her eyes, but she was so well tuned to his needs, that she always gave him what he wanted and needed most.

Wordlessly, Gideon took Deborah's hand and led her upstairs to their bedroom, where for that night he let the love he felt for his wife, and her love in return, warm him and keep the rage at bay.

Later, in the afterglow of lovemaking, he lay with Deborah in his arms. He flinched as the hatred returned uncalled for and unwanted. He knew that there would be no denying it. He would deal with the devil one day. [The bastard will pay with his life.] Gideon knew he wouldn't be able to fully rest until that day came. Suddenly, he felt a wave of calm and love sweep over him, again chasing away the hate. He looked down at his wife, who lay with her head on his shoulder. He couldn't see her face, but he knew she was awake and had felt his hatred. As the good feelings cocooned around him, Gideon kissed the top of Deborah's head and whispered lovingly, "Thank you."

As Deborah continued to send to him, Gideon finally managed to drift off to sleep. Unfortunately, the feelings of warmth and love didn't remain, and he had a restless sleep, filled

with dreams of what he would one day do to Lucas Buck.



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### Time to Heal

Gideon stood back and watched as Angel unlocked door to the garage where Michael's restored circa 2001 Ferrari was kept. It had been the only thing of real value that Michael had owned when he died, and he had bequeathed it to Angel.

Angel had explained to Gideon how Michael had always wanted the car and when Edgar's Industries had built the Ferrari kit, Michael had bought it, spending his free time away from work to assemble it. It had taken him three years to finish the car. Gideon sighed sadly. The work had only been completed a few days before Michael was killed.

Gideon was snapped out of his thoughts as Angel pulled open the two large doors, letting them swing back until they hit the walls with a bang. He moved forward to join Angel as she stood just outside the garage, and he let out a whistle of appreciation as he got his first look at the car.



Gideon nodded [Not bad at all]. He moved inside with Angel and watched her reach out to stroke the side of the car, as she walked alongside it toward the front. There was a sad expression on her face, and Gideon knew she was thinking of Michael.

For a moment he forgot the car as he observed Angel. Gideon knew there was still a long way to go before Angel got over the loss of her husband. [Then again will she ever really get over

losing Michael?] He doubted it. Yes, time would help her heal well enough to get on with her life, but he didn't believe it would heal her completely. No one ever really healed after a wound that painful. [God knows I never would, if I ever lost Deborah.] However, Angel was looking a lot stronger, her face no longer held the pallor it had retained for months. Even her sense of humor was slowly returning, and the fact that she was actually here, was further proof that she was doing better.

Three days ago, Gideon and Deborah had received a call from Angel, asking them if they could please come out to Los Angeles. She had told them that she was ready to deal with Michael's belongings and his will, but she needed them to be there with her. She couldn't face it alone. So Gideon and Deborah had brought Marcus and Mattie to Los Angeles and had helped Angel pack away Michael's belongings. It had been emotionally traumatic for Angel, but she had managed, with Gideon and Deborah's support.

Michael had left an addendum to his will, saying that he knew Angel was in no need of another sports car, and that if she wanted, she could sell the car and give the proceeds to a charity of her choice. Gideon remembered the codicil with a smile, as Michael had added that the local highway patrol would probably welcome Angel selling it.

Gideon and Deborah had questioned Angel on what Michael had meant. Angel had finally admitted that she had received numerous fines for speeding and that most of the California Highway Patrol officers knew her by name, and not because of her fame as an actress. [Always knew she was a speed freak,] Gideon thought, with a smile.

"How could Michael think I would even consider selling his car?" Angel's confused tone interrupted Gideon's inner thoughts. "I mean it's the only thing I have left of him, apart from my memories." Gideon watched as Angel swallowed back her tears.

Gideon wasn't sure how to answer. He considered for a moment before replying, smiling at Angel gently. "Maybe Michael thought that you would just think of it as a car. A nice car, but just a car." Even to Gideon his answer sounded lame.

Angel shook her head and reached out to stroke the car again. Her voice was a whisper. "I can't sell it. Michael loved this car." The words 'and I loved him' hung in the air unspoken.

Gideon moved around to put his arm around her, and he placed a gentle kiss on the top of her head. "Then don't."

After a long silence Angel said firmly, "I won't."

"OK, decision made. Now what do you plan on doing with it?" Gideon asked.

Angel was silent for a moment as she contemplated. Suddenly, a grin started to appear on her face. [I get the feeling I may not like this.] Then again, how could Gideon feel anything but joy that Angel was now strong enough emotionally to have that 'I'm-about-to-cause-trouble' look on her face? Gideon grinned back at Angel. "What have you got in mind?" [I may also regret that question later.]

Angel cleared her throat. "Well, it would be a crime to just let it sit in a garage. Michael said there was nothing like driving a Ferrari so..." Her voice trailed off with a smile.

Gideon chuckled. "So, you want to take her for a test drive? See how she handles and if you like her, you trade in the car you have for this one?"

Angel broke into a broad grin. "Exactly! Besides, Michael never got a chance to take me for a ride in it and..." Angel's voice stopped suddenly, but then she cleared her throat and continued. "Well, Michael may not be here to take me for a ride, but he is with me in my heart and at least on some level we can go for that ride together." Gideon's heart tore a little, as it always did when Angel was so brave in the face of her loss. For a moment the dark hatred for the man who had caused her pain redoubled, but Gideon pushed it back down. Now wasn't the time to be feeling that.

"Matt, will you go with me?" Angel asked, softly.

Gideon had to admit he was curious as to what the car would be like. He looked back at Angel. "I would be honored to ride shotgun with you, Angel." Gideon hesitated for a moment then added. "As long as you're sure?"

Angel smiled at him. "I know Michael wouldn't want me to do it alone. Besides it's been a long time since I drove a car from the 21st Century. I'd feel better if I had someone with me, although I've been told it is like riding a bicycle, you never forget."

Gideon gave a small snort. "It'd better be." He gave Angel a mock warning frown, and was pleased when she giggled.

"Don't worry! I'm sure it will be a smooth ride once I get used to the feel of the car." Angel opened the door of the driver side and got in.

Gideon stood for a moment, then walked around to the passenger side. [Why am I thinking 'Run Matt, Run'?] Gideon wondered, as he climbed into the passenger seat.

He looked across at Angel, grinning at him as he firmly buckled up his seat belt. "What?" he asked.

Angel shook her head and said. "You're nervous."

Gideon snorted and settled back into the seat, saying defiantly. "No I'm not!"

Angel chuckled as she replied, "If you say so, Captain."

Gideon snorted and waved a hand. "Just start the engine, will you?" Angel rolled her eyes and started the car up, then slowly backed out of the garage. When she had the car facing the exit to the storage compound, she stopped the car and looked at Gideon.

"Well, so far it's like riding a bicycle, but the real proof of that will be on the open road."

Gideon could hear the excitement in her voice. [Trouble!] "Just remember there are speed limits on those open roads." Gideon's warning was greeted by throaty laughter as Angel pulled out of the compound. [OK, make that big trouble!] Thought Gideon, as she headed the car down the road towards the freeway.

"For God's sake Angel, slow down!" Gideon begged, through gritted teeth, as Angel accelerated a

little to overtake a car in front of her.

Angel responded by laughing and shaking her head. "Not a chance. A car like this is build for speed." She was literally glowing with excitement as she swung into the right lane and then out again to overtake another car. Gideon groaned and gripped his seat harder. He could swear Angel was doing this on purpose to scare the hell out him.

"On a racetrack maybe, not on public roads!" He yelled.

Gideon's heart landed in his feet as Angel took her eyes off the road to pull a face at him. "Oh, stop being such an old woman, Matt. This is fun!" With that, Angel stepped even harder on the accelerator, shooting the Ferrari forward along the coastal highway. Gideon's hand involuntarily left the seat it had been gripping, to clutch the door handle. He shot Angel a dark look as she laughed, having noticed the movement.

"Anyone would swear you were afraid." Angel's voice was heavy with mirth.

Gideon's voice cracked as he replied. "No I am not!" [Oh that sounded believable!] To cover up his unconvincing response, Gideon cleared his throat and said accusingly. "Anyone would think you were trying to scare me!"

Angel chuckled, then became silent and Gideon got the uneasy feeling that she was contemplating something. Suddenly, she shook her head and snorted in disgust, as yet another car blocked the lane directly in front of her. For a moment, and to Gideon's great relief, Angel had to brake. His stomach momentarily settled back where it belonged, instead of being glued to the back of the seat.

"No, this is just no good." Angel's voice showed her disappointment. "Stupid cars are stopping me really opening this baby up. Michael said there was nothing like pushing a Ferrari up to its limit." Angel sighed, then started chewing her lip in concentration.

[Oh God, what's she thinking now?] Gideon was just getting used to the feel of the car going slowly and was hoping it would stay that way.

"Aha, that's it!" She said, suddenly. Gideon was just about to ask what she meant when Angel accelerated again, pinning his head to the seat's headrest, as she pulled out and overtook, then cut back in again. Then, just as suddenly, the Ferrari changed direction. To his horror, Gideon heard himself yelp at the unexpected change. He glanced out the window, as Angel turned off the freeway.

"What the hell are you doing?" Gideon half-screamed, when he finally managed to push his heart down out of his throat.

Angel laughed again. "This road won't have too much traffic on it at this time of day. Now I can really see how fast this car can go."

Gideon was only able to whisper, "Oh God," before Angel changed gear and slammed her foot down onto the gas again. Gideon swore he stopped breathing as the Ferrari surged forward again. The pollution free Minbari power cell under the hood seemed to have as much punch as the original engine, and Angel seemed determined to find out just how fast that cell could take her.

A dozen thoughts whizzed through Gideon's mind at about the same speed as the car. It was crazy for him to feel this way. He'd been a Captain of a Starship that went at speeds hundreds of times faster than this. Hell, he'd gone just as fast and even faster than this on Deborah's bike. Why was Angel driving like a bat out of hell making him so nervous? [Control. That's it!]. He wasn't in control.

For a moment, Gideon forgot how nervous he was, as he observed Angel. She was focused on the road but he could see her face was flushed with excitement. She was having the time of her life. Gideon smiled. It had been a long time since he had seen Angel look so happy and excited.

Angel laughed suddenly and yelled, "Oh my God, Matt! Michael was right. There's nothing like this!"

Gideon felt the Ferrari's speed increase again, and he looked at the speedometer. His stomach dropped and his only thought was, [Oh crap,] as he saw that the car had until now had only been going at half its maximum speed. Angel was clearly intent on going faster.

Five miles further down the road, Gideon was convinced he was going to die. Angel was a mad woman in control of a Ferrari. The faster the car went, the more excited she became. Later, Gideon would probably look back on this moment and be happy that after so much sadness Angel had been able to have so much fun, but for now all Gideon could think of was that he wanted out. Or better yet, let him have a chance at the wheel. [Now there's a thought!]

"Hey, Angel. How about you pull up somewhere and let me have a go at dri..." Gideon didn't get a chance to finish that sentence as Angel cut him off with a laugh and shook her head.

"Not a chance, Captain!"

It was then that Gideon realized that part of Angel's joy came from rattling his nerves. [A speed freak and a sadist.] He looked out the window and wondered if he would survive the impact, if he tried to jump out of the moving car.

Suddenly, the sound of a police siren could be heard. Gideon turned to look out of the back window. He felt enormous relief at the sight of a California High Patrol car, pulling out from behind a large billboard and into the road behind them, giving chase. [My savior!]

"Oh bugger!" Angel cursed softly, as she checked her rearview mirror. Gideon glanced at Angel, raised an eyebrow and clicked his tongue. His reward for his bravery was Angel glowering at him as she began to slow down. Finally, she pulled over and they both waited, as the police car pulled up behind them.

As they waited for the officer to climb out his car and approach the Ferrari, Angel sighed and Gideon, whose sense of humor was returning now that the car wasn't moving, grinned wickedly at her. "So, how many speeding tickets will this make?"

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Twenty minutes later, Gideon watched as Officer Jonathan North handed Angel a speeding ticket and said. "Now Ms Denier, you have to promise me that you'll stop speeding. This is your eighth ticket this year. You're going to have your license suspended if you keep this up." The corners of North's mouth curved up in a slight smile. Obviously, he was well aware of

Angel's reputation, and from what Gideon could gather, had personally issued Angel a couple of previous tickets.

Angel looked up at Officer North contritely. "I promise to be good." Gideon placed a hand over his mouth to smother a snort of disbelief as he kept on watching. [Another Oscar winning performance...]

"Hmm." North mused, as he looked at Angel then at the Ferrari. "With a car like that, why don't I believe you?"

Angel gave him a big smile. "Come on now, Jonathan. How could you think I wouldn't keep my promise to you?"

North shook his head and laughed. "Because three times now I've caught you and each time you've promised me the same thing." North was trying to sound stern, but Gideon could hear the laughter in his tone. Gideon could no longer hold back his own laughter, but as Angel shot him a look, he coughed to try and cover it up. [She'll make me pay for that.] Gideon thought. Then again, he decided he didn't care. He was enjoying this moment way too much.

Angel turned her attention back to North, clearing her throat as she said, "Ah well, I do have the most terrible memory, I must have forgotten."

North laughed even harder. "We just can't win with you, can we?" He shook his head and smiled at Angel. "Well, maybe this time you can remember. That's an official order from an Officer of the California Highway Patrol, OK?"

Gideon felt like choking on his suppressed laughter as Angel snapped a salute at the patrolman and said firmly, "Yes, Sir."

North laughed and smiled warmly. "You are something else, Ms Denier." Shaking his head, he added, "Well, be on your way then."

Angel nodded and walked over to Gideon. When she reached him she gave him a wicked smile and said softly, "Ready for the ride back, Captain?" From the way she said it, Gideon knew he was in for an even more nerve-wracking drive back. All thoughts that Angel might actually keep to the speed limit vanished.

Instead of answering, Gideon hurriedly called after Officer North, who had stopped short of getting into his patrol car. "Would you mind giving me a ride home?"

North frowned, clearly confused. Gideon ignored the grin Angel was giving him and walked over to North, whispering so that Angel couldn't hear what he was saying. Gideon had enough pride not to want North to know the real reason he didn't want to go back with Angel. So he explained that Angel wasn't going back to her house, where he was visiting with his wife. North nodded his understanding and said he was heading that way and would be happy to drop him off.

Gideon turned to Angel, who was clearly curious as to what he was up to. "Ah, since you're heading further into the hills, I'm going to hitch a ride back with the good Officer here..." Gideon paused as he suddenly wondered if that would upset Angel. After all, she had wanted him along for a reason. He walked over to her and added softly, "Nothing personal Angel, but



your driving has aged me by ten years."

He smiled down at her to show he was teasing, then added more seriously. "You've no problem with handling the car, so maybe you can go the rest of the way alone?" Gideon watched as for a moment Angel's eyes filled with sadness. He knew she understood what he was saying. This would give her the chance to go for that ride with Michael.

The sadness left Angel's eyes as she nodded and became more mischievous. "You're right, besides..." Angel thumped Gideon on the arm. "You're no fun. You don't appreciate the speed!"

"Oh, I appreciate speed! I just like to be in control of it." Gideon said. Both of them grinned at each other, then he added, looking back at North, "I'd better not keep my ride waiting."

Angel nodded and said in a whisper, "And I want to get that car back on the road."

Gideon chuckled and hugged Angel to him for a moment, saying into her ear, "Just be careful!"

He could feel Angel nod against his shoulder and heard her say, "I will." Then he let go of her and went over to the patrol car.

Just as Angel was about to get into the Ferrari, Officer North called after Angel, "And drive slowly!"

Neither of the men could help smiling, as Angel responded with a smile and another salute. Gideon and North stood and watched as Angel started up the car then revved the engine. Gideon glanced over at North as the officer frowned, then turned back to watch. Angel pulled away from the side of the road, kicking up a trail of gravel and dust in her wake, as the Ferrari shot forward at breakneck speed. Neither of the men was able to look away as they watched Angel very rapidly disappearing down the road.

"She has a real problem with authority figures doesn't she?" North said softly.

Gideon didn't take his eyes of the vanishing Ferrari as he chuckled and shook his head. "You have no idea!"

When the Ferrari had finally disappeared over a rise in the road, Gideon and North got into the patrol car and drove off. As they headed back towards the coast and home, Gideon thought about Angel. From what had happened in the past couple of hours, he knew that Angel was going to survive. Her enjoyment of just one ride in the Ferrari and making Gideon nervous was proof enough of that. He looked out the window and smiled to himself, thinking happily, [Oh yeah, she's going to be just fine.]

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## The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four X

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