

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Five A - Part 1: A Marriage of Inconvenience

by The Space Witches



The prettiest girl at the wedding.

Chapter 2

Gideon stood in front of the bathroom mirror, cleaning his teeth, thinking back on the evening he had just spent. After they'd all helped Jack get Angel's gear up to the castle and into their rooms, Harry had taken Baby to the kitchens to feed him, while John and Luke had gone off together, leaving the two Gideons alone. It wasn't the way Matt Gideon had anticipated spending the evening, but he'd sighed and accepted the inevitable, inviting Jack to join him for dinner in his rooms.

The two men had talked for hours, mainly about the sisters, with Gideon telling Jack about some of his experiences of living with them over the years, and imparting some hard earned advice about how best to deal with them. Gideon smiled into the mirror as he remembered telling Jack that none of his familiarity would be that helpful anyway. The sisters would always find new ways to surprise the men in their lives.

The return of the children from their explorations with Max and Dureena had interrupted the man-to-man talk, and Jack had wandered off to see if he could find his way back to his rooms

again.

Having checked that they'd had their supper, Gideon had then helped get his children ready for bed. One look at their clothes, hands and faces had made him order them both into the bathroom; wanting to get them clean before their mother reappeared and saw the state they were in. Marcus had insisted on taking a shower in privacy, although Gideon had carried out an inspection before letting his son rush off to the room he was sharing with Dasha.

Gideon had then frog-marched his six-year old daughter, Mattie, into the bathroom, where he'd already run the bath for her. Throwing a sponge at her, he'd told her not to come out until she was clean, and left her to it. When Mattie had finally emerged, her blonde curls darkened with water, Gideon had inspected her fingernails, (left to her own devices, Mattie would have had potatoes growing in the dirt she built up under them) checked behind her ears and the back of her neck, then walked her to the nursery, where she was spending the night with the other girls, Faylinn, Naima and Ilori.

Gideon wasn't entirely sure it was wise to let the four girls bunk together, as he thought there was a good chance that between them they would bring the castle down around their ears before morning, but he'd kept silent about his concerns and kissed Mattie's forehead after tucking her into bed. He'd had no doubt that she would be out of bed and causing trouble before he'd gone ten paces down the corridor outside the girls' room.

Before he'd left he'd also looked fondly at his other--unacknowledged--daughter, Naima. She was now nine and a half years old, and growing up to be a carbon copy of her mother, Lily, in appearance, but with a calmer, less volatile temperament. The little girl was beautiful, and Gideon had been delighted to see her and Mattie getting along so well together. Naima's composed but determined manner controlled Mattie's more explosive nature. Watching Naima and Mattie together reminded Gideon of how Lily and Deborah often interacted, but with the temperaments reversed. In the daughters the blonde had the fiery temper, while the red head was the cool, calmer soul.

Gideon had returned to Deborah's rooms, and was now wondering where his wife was, and how much longer she was likely to be. A movement in the doorway of the bathroom caught his eye and answered his question.

Deborah stood with her arms crossed, leaning against the door jam, a mischievous smile on her face. That look sent a shiver of anticipation down Gideon's spine. He knew it meant his wife was in the mood for fun. It looked as if it was going to be an interesting night.

Patting his mouth dry with a soft towel, Gideon turned and smiled, asking, "What are you up to?"

Deborah's gaze raked his body from his bare feet, up past the jogging pants he'd pulled on after taking a shower, lingering on his groin, then up across his shoulders, left bare by the grey undershirt he wore, before finally meeting his eyes. Her voice was deep and sultry as she said, "I'm just enjoying the view."

Gideon leaned back against the basin, crossing his arms in front of him as he smiled and asked, "Well? Do we have a wedding or not?"

Deborah grinned back. "How could you doubt us?" She went on to describe how they had

found Angel kneeling at the side of Bubba's grave in the orchard. "She was crying so hard she could hardly see, but she was still trying to put the flowers she'd picked into an old jar and place it on the grave."

Deborah's eyes filled with tears at the memory, and Gideon started to move toward his wife to comfort her, but she waved him back, sniffing and wiping her tears away as she went on. "We took her back to Lily's rooms and since then we've been taking it in turns to hug her and yell at her."

Deborah described how they had argued with Angel, going over all the reasons why she should go ahead with her wedding, and why letting a dog come between her and Jack was downright stupid. "It took a while but we got through in the end. Ilas has just taken her to the rooms we set aside for her and Jack. It's up to them now."

"So what happens to Baby?" Gideon was curious but he suspected he knew the answer.

His wife smiled and fluttered her eyelashes at him, making him laugh. He knew that look all too well. Deborah's voice had a wheedling tone as she said, "Baby comes back to Earth with us. Is that OK? You know Marcus and Mattie will love the idea." Before Gideon could speak, she rushed on, "I know we always said we couldn't have a dog because of all the traveling we do, but maybe we could get a house-sitter who could look after Baby when we need to be away? That could work, couldn't it?"

Gideon laughed out loud. He never could refuse his wife when she really wanted something. He chuckled as he said, "Do I really get any choice in the matter? If you and the kids want it, I don't think I get much of a say in it. I'm sure we can work something out. Is that all the news?"

Deborah shook her head. "Just one other thing." She grinned again. "Angel wants Marcus to give her away at the wedding."

Gideon raised his eyebrows in surprise. He hadn't expected that.

His wife went on, "Angel was going to ask Luke, as you'll be busy being Jack's best man, but then she decided that Marcus is her nearest male blood relative, so she wants him to walk her down the aisle. Do you think he'll be OK with it?"

Gideon laughed again. "In exchange for a dog, he'd do just about anything Angel asks. He might even smarten himself up without being nagged for once. OK, is that it? Any other bombshells?"

Deborah frowned, and Gideon tilted his head to one side as he asked, "What is it? Something's still bothering you."



He watched as his wife shook her head and replied, "I made sure that while we were together we didn't all touch each other at the same time. Whatever went on down by the ship, I didn't want it to happen again. We talked about it, and none of us understands what happened, although I'm not sure Angel was completely open with us. I sensed she was holding back. Anyway..." Deborah paused and her face cleared, the mischievous grin reappearing as she said, "I checked on the children on my way back, and they're both sound asleep. So we have the whole night ahead of us, with no distractions or interruptions, I hope. I have some very fond memories of things we got up to in these rooms. Want to make some new memories?"

Gideon lunged forward and pulled his wife into his arms, holding her tightly against his chest as he kissed her passionately. Deborah swayed her hips, rubbing herself against him, starting a fire deep in his groin. [Oh, yes, we're definitely having fun tonight,] Gideon thought, as her mouth opened and her tongue met his.

He moved his hand to Deborah's breast, ripping her shirt open and sliding his hand inside her bra, playing with her nipple and feeling it harden under his touch. Deborah threw back her head and moaned with pleasure as he kissed her neck and ears, using his mouth and hands to give her as much pleasure as he knew how.

Deborah's hands slipped inside the waistband of Gideon's pants and found his stiffening cock, stroking it gently, bringing it standing to almost painful attention within seconds. She pulled his undershirt up over his head and threw it across the bathroom, then pushed his pants down around his thighs, dropped to her knees, and slowly took his cock into her mouth.

Gideon let out his own groan of pleasure as she sucked on him, running her tongue around the head of his cock, taking him deeper and deeper inside her mouth and throat. His hands were now entwined in Deborah's thick, soft hair, holding her head as she continued to drive him wild with pleasure.

When she had brought him to the brink of orgasm, Gideon pushed her away, pulled his cock from her mouth, then lifted her to her feet. He turned her around until she faced the mirror, pulling her shirt off her shoulders and releasing her breasts from the bra that imprisoned them. Looking over Deborah's shoulder at her reflection in the mirror, Gideon watched as he caressed her beautiful breasts with one hand, while sliding the other down to unfasten her pants, all the while rubbing his hard shaft against her butt. Within seconds she stood naked before him, leaning forward with her arms braced against the basin, her legs slightly parted.

Gideon gazed at his wife's reflection in the mirror. Her lips were swollen, her neck flushed and her nipples hard with desire. She ran her tongue over lips dried from the heat of her passion and whispered, "Fuck me, Matthew. Fuck me hard."

Gideon didn't need to be asked twice. Positioning his cock carefully at her entrance, he drove into her with one swift thrust.

Pounding into her relentlessly, Gideon watched in the mirror as Deborah lost herself in pleasure. He moved his hands from her breasts to her inner thighs, fingering her clit, then moving back to her nipples again, all the time stroking, fondling, and caressing. He knew he was hitting the place deep inside his wife that lifted her to heights of passion he had never known with another woman. He hung onto his need to come with all his resistance, waiting for her, needing her to come with him, until finally he felt her walls tighten around him and heard

her scream of pleasure as orgasm overwhelmed her. Deborah's waves of pleasure crashed over him, taking him with her to a new realm of bliss.

When the orgasms finally stopped and Gideon was able to think coherently again, he pushed his wife's damp hair away from her shoulders and kissed her gently on the neck. Looking at her reflection in the mirror, he could see Deborah's eyes looking back at him, the golden brown almost swallowed by her dilated pupils, full of the blackness of passion.

Finally regaining enough breath to speak, Gideon gasped, "You haven't sent that strongly for a long time. I think the whole castle will have felt that one."

Deborah smiled lasciviously and leaned back against Gideon's chest, the sweat on her back mingling with his. She tilted her head back, encouraging him to kiss her throat and neck as she whispered, "Let's go out on the terrace and do it again under the stars. Out there you can probably make me come hard enough so they'll feel it up on the Excalibur."

Gideon laughed as his hands roved over her body, stroking, caressing, reveling in the feel of her soft skin, made softer by the sheen of sweat that now covered her. "Just give me a few minutes to recover. I'm not as young as I was when we first did it in this room."

Leaning back, Gideon pulled himself out of his wife, then turned her to face him, kissing her gently as he held her face in his hands. Then he released her lips and looked deep into her eyes, remembering the first time they had made love in her rooms in the castle.

That night and the following day he had been partly prisoner, partly in hiding and under Deborah's protection. Nearly twelve years had passed since then, but his first sight of Deborah's naked body was still engraved in Gideon's mind. He found it hard to believe that he hadn't loved her from the moment he met her, but that night he hadn't known her at all. It was only in the months that followed that he had come to love her. Now he couldn't imagine life without her.

Deborah's golden brown eyes gazed back at him, and suddenly filled with tears. Gideon frowned and asked, "What's the matter?"

Deborah gave a tearful laugh, whispering, "I can feel how you feel, and it makes me so happy that you love me so much. I can't help it, it makes me cry."

Gideon started to laugh and pulled her naked body into his arms, crushing her against him. A stray thought went through his mind as he kissed his wife again.

[I hope that Angel and Jack can make each other as happy as we do.]

Then all thoughts were banished as he started to make love to his wife again.

Jack was deep inside Angelique, thrusting into her, touching her and holding her, bringing her to the brink of orgasm, when the wave of pleasure crashed down on him. He lost all control, and started to come, then came and came and came. It was like nothing he'd ever experienced before. Angelique was screaming and writhing beneath him, the walls of her vagina contracting around him with every orgasm, pulling his semen from him, pumping him dry, her whole

body wracked with pleasure.

Somehow, Jack was sharing that pleasure. Somehow he was feeling how it felt for her. Not just the one incredible release he normally felt, but wave after wave, surge upon surge, building to an almost unbearable crescendo of bliss, that finally crashed down on him, driving all the strength from his arms, leaving him laying on Angelique's breasts, gasping for air, and wondering what had happened.

As he lay in Angelique's arms, trying to find the strength to move, Angelique stroked his hair, and gave a throaty chuckle as she whispered, "Are you OK?"

Finally able to rouse himself from his state of collapse, Jack rolled onto his side and pulled Angelique into his arms. She rested her head on his shoulder, kissing his chest and running her hand over his belly as he asked, "What the hell happened? It's never been like that before! Did we do that?"

Angelique chuckled again. "It was us, but it wasn't just us. That was Demon. Matt must have got her pretty worked up. I didn't think she was strong enough to send that loudly any more."

Jack looked down at Angelique in amazement. He could see her clearly in the soft light of the lamp they had left lit on the bedside table. "You mean..." He paused, not quite sure how to say it.

Angelique looked up at him, her eyes sparkling with humor. "That was Demon having one hell of an orgasm. Actually, from the feel of it, more than one. You know she can send emotions as well as feel them? Well, that's one emotion she can't help sending. It affects everyone but her sisters. We know when it's happening, but it doesn't drive us crazy like it does everyone else."

Jack thought about it for a moment, then grinned back. "So that means it wasn't her who made you come like that, but me?"

Angelique licked her lips, and peered up at him from under her thick dark lashes. That look sent shivers down Jack's spine. Her voice was throaty and sultry as she whispered, "That was all you, Jack. Well, you and your little friend down here."

As she spoke, Angelique's fingers caressed Jack's cock, making it twitch with anticipation. Jack growled, "Less of the little," then pushed her onto her back and started making love to her again.

When all passion was spent and they finally lay in each other's arms, drowsy with the aftermath of pleasure, Jack thought back on the day, and wondered at the emotional rollercoaster he'd ridden. It seemed he'd run through the whole gamut of feelings that day, from ecstasy to despair, from anger to calm acceptance of his fate, and finally to the deep contentment he now felt. Angelique was his again, and nothing was going to take her away from him.

She had returned to their rooms earlier, and flung herself into his arms, telling him over and over how sorry she was, and how much she loved him. Jack had held her tightly, telling her it didn't matter. Nothing mattered, as long as they were together. Within minutes, they'd been naked and making love.

A scratching noise roused Jack from the edge of sleep and he lay still, listening carefully. For a moment, there was silence, then it started again. He felt Angelique tense in his arms, and she whispered, "What is it? Where's it coming from?"

Jack barely breathed, "Shush." In the silence that followed, they both heard the noise again.

Angelique whispered again, "It's coming from the door."

Jack nodded. He slid off the side of the bed and walked silently to the spot where his pants had landed, when Angelique had almost torn them off him earlier. Their clothes were scattered around the bedroom, abandoned in their mutual haste to undress each other. Jack heard movement behind him and saw that Angelique was also sliding off the four-poster bed. Forcing himself not to be distracted by the sight of her naked body, Jack raised his finger to his lips, and shook his head, gesturing to her to get back into the bed.

The glare Angelique gave him showed she wasn't happy about it, but she obeyed, and pulled the covers up to her neck, watching anxiously as Jack quickly pulled on his pants. He then moved silently over to where his jacket lay on the floor nearby and reached into the inner pocket, taking out the small PPG he'd concealed there. When he'd dressed that morning, Jack had wondered whether he should bother taking the gun, but for years he'd never set foot outside his ship unarmed, and he'd decided he shouldn't break that habit. Now he was glad of the weapon.

Moving slowly and silently, Jack approached the door with his PPG held ready. As he arrived there, the sound came again. It was coming from low down, near the floor.

Taking a deep breath to steady his hand, Jack looked back at Angelique quickly, making sure that she was out of the line of fire from the doorway. She was still in the bed, with the bedcovers clutched at her neck, but she didn't look at all frightened. Her crystal blue eyes were narrowed and she was glaring at the door, ready to strike if necessary. Jack knew that with her telekinetic powers, Angelique could probably tackle any intruder with ease, and he was glad to have her at his back.

Grasping the door knob firmly, Jack wrenched the door open. There was a flash of movement at his feet, and he span around, ready to shoot whatever it was that had shot through the open doorway, when Angelique screamed, "No! Don't shoot!"

Jack dropped his weapon to his side and started to laugh. It had been a big leap for a little dog, but somehow Baby had managed to scramble up onto the high four poster bed, and was now standing at the foot of the mattress, panting happily as he gazed at Jack, his little tail wagging frantically.

"Where did he come from?" Jack asked as he walked across to the bed, watching as Angelique scooped Baby into her arms, and cuddled him, scolding him all the time she stroked his ears.

Angelique looked up and grinned. "He must have got away from Harry and followed his nose until he found us. He's good at following a scent."

She kissed Baby's nose and Jack laughed again. He deposited the PPG on the bedside table, and stripped off his pants as he got back onto the bed and lay down next to her. Baby immediately began to struggle and wriggled out of Angelique's arms. He climbed onto Jack's chest and

started licking his nose. Jack chuckled and pushed the little dog away, until Baby settled down in the space between Jack and Angelique.

Angelique looked at the man and dog lying next to her on the bed and started to giggle. "I think he wants to sleep with us, Jack."

Jack snorted, "Well he can forget that. What if I wake up in the night and want to make love to you again? I can't do that with two big doggy brown eyes watching me."

Angelique leaned over and kissed Jack gently, the movement causing her naked breasts to move in a way that left him quite breathless. He felt himself becoming aroused again, and wondered just how many times he could make love with Angelique in one night, and still be able to walk in the morning. He decided that this might be the night he found out.

Picking up the little dog and cuddling him in a way that made Jack feel quite envious, Angelique said, "It would be a little off-putting. I'll go and make him up a bed in the living room, and he can sleep there." Her eyes sparkled as her gaze drifted down Jack's body to his stiffening shaft. "Don't start without me."



Jack grinned and watched as she moved off the bed and out of the bedroom. The sight of her naked butt, swaying sensuously as she walked, aroused him further. He reached down and grasped his cock, massaging it into erection, eager for Angelique's return.

A few moments later she reappeared in the doorway, and paused, allowing Jack to take in the full impact of her naked body. He pumped his cock more vigorously as he gazed at her long, slim legs, narrow hips, tiny waist, and full, firm breasts. Angelique was the sexiest woman in the universe, and he couldn't quite believe that she loved him and wanted to marry him.

All his doubts were banished from his mind, as Angelique strutted across the room toward the bed, then climbed on at the foot, crawling up toward him as he lay. She moved his ankles apart so she could crawl between his legs, then gently moved his hand from his cock. After another incredibly sexy look up at him through her lashes, Angelique said nothing, but just lowered her head and took him into her mouth.

Jack lay back and groaned. He decided he really must have died and gone to heaven, where he had his very own angel to attend to his every need.

8th July 2280

Alwyn stood proudly with his arm around Sarah's waist and his other hand resting on his son's shoulder, as the ship's ramp lowered and revealed the people waiting for them below.

It was odd to see two Matt Gideons standing side by side, each with their arm around the woman they loved best. Alwyn narrowed his eyes and flicked into place the device that allowed him to examine the genetic structure of each man. They were indeed identical, with the only differences being the external marks left by the progress of time.

The new Gideon, the one they called Jack, had a few more grey hairs than the original, but other than that there was little difference between them physically. The main differentiation between the two men was more subtle. There was an air of haunted fear that hung over the new version; the result of the trials and traumas he had experienced during his last years in his own universe, and the years he had spent alone since then.

Alwyn watched as Jack Gideon shifted his curious gaze from the Technomage's ship, and looked down at the woman around whose waist his arm rested. The instant Angel looked up at him, everything about Jack changed. The fear and despair that hung around him dissipated, and the smile that turned up the corners of his mouth was full of love. Angel looked back up at him with complete adoration, then they were both distracted by the barking of the small dog that sat at their feet.

Jaysen pulled away from his parents and raced down the ramp, running over to where the children all stood grouped together. Alwyn and Sarah followed him down and were immediately surrounded by their friends. Lily, Luke and John all tried to hug Sarah at once, while Ilas, Max and Dureena greeted Alwyn.

It was quite a while before everyone stopped hugging each other and telling each other how well they looked. During that time, Jaysen and the other children had run off together, with Demon calling after them to stay within the village and cultivated areas.

Alwyn smiled. The tall blonde needn't have worried. As his ship had descended, the Mage had scanned the area surrounding the castle, and had seen that the local wildlife was entering its active, dangerous phase. He had therefore programmed his ship to set up a force-field around the whole area, which would keep the predators out and the children in. Alwyn made a mental note to tell the witches about it later, so they wouldn't worry about their children.

In the meantime, the Mage turned to look again at the two Gideons, while Sarah was busy catching up with John, Dureena and Luke.

Jack Gideon looked at him with narrowed eyes and said, "You don't look much like the Technomage I met on Regula IV."

Alwyn laughed. "No, I don't suppose I do." He smoothed down the head of hair he no longer concealed, and went on, "It was easier for the people there to accept me as an doddering old man, and I could hardly show you my true appearance in front of them, now could I? But Sarah prefers this version, so this is how I now choose to appear."

Matt Gideon chewed his lip and said quietly, "Choose? That's an interesting way of phrasing it, Alwyn. I sometimes think that this appearance is as misleading as the bumbling old man who loved golden dragons."

Alwyn said nothing, just smiled maliciously, and after a few seconds Matt continued, "Talking of which, where's Ishtar? When we last met, she and I had just gotten to the point where I thought my ears were safe."

Jack Gideon looked puzzled, so Matt explained about Alwyn's familiar, and told the story about how they had first met, rubbing his ear as he did so. They were all walking up to the castle together by this time, with Demon and Angel silently accompanying their men. Alwyn walked alone, but he was well aware that his beloved Sarah was following only a few paces

behind, deep in conversation with Luke Raven, while the others followed, chatting animatedly.

"Ishtar is staying in the ship with her baby. She's gotten a little protective recently, which worries me somewhat. Female dragons usually only get that way when they're getting broody. I do hope she doesn't come into heat again while we're here. She's been off-cycle again recently."

Alwyn was gratified to see Matt Gideon pale, and his wife chuckled as she said in her deep, soft voice, "Just give us a little warning this time, will you, Alwyn? We can at least make sure the Narns are out of range. Otherwise we'll be knee deep in pouchlings again."



The Mage laughed. "And how is my old friend G'Tan and his family? Will they be here today?"

Angel spoke for the first time, telling Alwyn that the Narn marines would be attending the wedding, along with most of her other friends from the Excalibur. The Mage ignored

Matt Gideon's muttering that the ship would be running on a skeleton crew, and that they were still trying to figure out how to get enough seats into the throne room, where the ceremony would be held.

As they walked through the castle gates and on into the courtyard, Alwyn couldn't help recalling the first time he'd come to this place. A mischievous smile played on his lips as he remembered how he had interrupted Matt and Demon on that occasion. He was sure there would be more opportunities for such mischief during the coming days, as the pair looked more like teenagers drunk on hormones than the middle aged couple they truly were. They could hardly keep their hands off each other, and Angel and Jack Gideon were no better.

Alwyn smiled to himself again, and stopped walking, turning to allow his partner to catch up with him. As Sarah reached his side, he put his arm around her waist and hugged her to him. Looking around at all the beautiful women in the courtyard, Alwyn decided that for him there was still only one woman whose beauty and grace outshone all others. His beloved Sarah was and always would be the most beautiful woman in the universe, in her face and form, but most importantly, in her heart and soul.

Angel watched and smiled as she saw the way Alwyn looked at Sarah. It was a look she recognized easily. It was the same way Jack looked at Angel every day. She held her lover's hand tightly as they all entered the castle, heading for the dining room where breakfast was laid out for them. She said little, but listened and watched as the others talked and moved around, bantering and joking, while the twelve adults served themselves from the sideboard and moved to sit at the large central table. They had all just gotten themselves seated when the children arrived all at once, descending on the remaining food like a plague of locusts, before joining their parents at the table, talking and laughing excitedly between mouthfuls of food.

Even Max and Dureena were joining in with the laughter and good humor that permeated the castle. The raven haired witch had been concerned that Ilas' partners felt less than comfortable with her family, but now it seemed everyone had come together on good terms at last. Even Max and Matt were talking to each other with a startling degree of civility. Angel decided she would have to thank Demon and Ilas later, as they had obviously given strict orders to both

men to behave.

Sitting at the table, occasionally sneaking bits of bacon to Baby as he sat at her feet, Angel felt happier than she could ever remember feeling in her life. It seemed that she had everything she'd ever wanted: a man who loved her and whom she adored, her family around her, and a happy future ahead of her. She pushed aside the momentary thought of how it would have been even better if her son could have been with her, too. She ruthlessly suppressed the pain and anger that welled up inside her when she thought about Lucas and Gabriel, pushing it down deep inside her where she could ignore it and go on enjoying the happiness of this day.

This was the day when she would be married to Jack Gideon and this was the happiest day of her life.

She turned to gaze at her lover, but was distracted as Alwyn used his teaspoon to knock gently against his cup. The ringing noise attracted everyone's attention, and they fell silent as the Technomage asked, "So what's the plan for the day? What time is the big event, and where should we all congregate?"

There was silence for a moment, then Demon cleared her throat and spoke quietly but authoritatively as she explained what was planned.

"The wedding will take place at sunset, and will be held in the throne room, after which a buffet supper will be served here in the dining room. After lunch we need to round up the children and start getting everyone ready. All the crew of the Excalibur who can be spared will be coming down in shuttles during the afternoon, and Luke, Max and Dureena have kindly agreed to act as ushers and show everyone to their places, while my sisters and I dress. As best man, Matthew has to make sure he gets Jack to the right place at the right time, while John will no doubt be having kittens in the throne room as he rehearses the ceremony."

John protested that he wasn't nervous at all, making Lily giggle and ask why he'd been up studying all night if he was so sure of himself. Angel laughed along with the rest as John flushed a little, saying that he just wanted to be certain he got his first ever wedding ceremony right.

The Captain of the Excalibur had been stunned when Jack and Angel had asked him to conduct their wedding. First he'd said he wasn't sure he had the authority to marry anyone who wasn't a member of his crew. Then he'd been concerned that his authority only extended to marriages actually taking place on the Excalibur. Matt had butted in at that point, to confirm John's view, but they had eventually ironed things out by agreeing to hold a short civil ceremony on the Excalibur at a later date. Nevertheless, both Angel and Jack had been vehement that they wanted John to conduct the occasion on Eriadne.

Angel knew this was important to Jack. He had lost his own John Matheson in horrifying circumstances in his original universe. Because of Jack's long absence from their lives, he and John had never really established a new relationship in this universe, but to Jack, John was still the man who had once been his best friend. Jack was delighted with the way John's life had turned out in this reality, and immensely proud of his protégé's alternative self. It would be the ultimate validation of both Jack and John's positions in this world to have the Captain of the Excalibur conduct the wedding.

As the breakfast party broke up, Demon offered to show Alwyn and Sarah to their rooms. She turned to Jaysen and asked, "How would you feel about sharing with Marcus and Dasha? Vya has his own room, and you can be by yourself too, if you prefer, but we thought it might be more fun for the three of you to bunk together."

Jaysen accepted the offer with enthusiasm, and left with the other two boys. Demon smiled and said to Sarah, "We've put you in the room you had when you first visited us. Is that OK?"

Alwyn watched as Sarah laughed. "It's more than OK, Demon. I loved that room. After that visit, when things got tough on the Excalibur, and then after that on Earth, I used to dream about coming back to that room, and relaxing in the wonderful tub, while watching the sunset."

Sarah's face seemed to glow with inner happiness as she turned to her partner and held out her hand. "All I needed to make the room perfect was someone to share it with. Are you up for the job?"

Her lascivious wink made Alwyn chuckle, and he took her hand, lifting it to kiss it gently, and whispering so only she could hear, "I'm up for anything you want, my love," as he winked back. He straightened up and allowed his face to fall into more serious lines as he went on, "Would you go on ahead with Demon? I'll join you shortly."

Sarah raised an eyebrow but didn't question him. It was one of the many things Alwyn loved about her. She accepted that he would tell her when the time was right, and never nagged or pouted. He watched as Sarah and Demon left the room together, then reached out to touch Angel's arm, as she was about to leave the dining room with Jack.

"Angel, could you spare me a few moments? There's something I'd like to discuss with you, if I may." Alwyn's tone was serious, and from the expression on Angel's face, he thought she might have guessed what he wanted to talk about.

Turning to Jack, she kissed him lightly on the cheek and said, "I won't be long."

Jack nodded, but looked at the Technomage suspiciously, before turning and leaving the room, with Baby trotting behind him like a second shadow.

Angel smiled up at Alwyn and said, "Why don't we go to the library? We can have some privacy there."

Angel curled up on one of the sofas in the library and waited for Alwyn to speak. She thought she knew what he wanted to say, but for once in her life she decided to be patient. The Mage sat looking at her seriously for a few moments, then reached out to take her hand, patting it gently as he smiled and asked, "What happened? Do you want to tell me about it?"

The raven haired witch smiled gently and squeezed his hand. "I think you know, don't you, Alwyn?" She still wasn't sure what had happened herself, and hoped that Alwyn would be more forthcoming.

Alwyn smiled and shook his head. "*Know* is too strong a word. I sensed something, and

surmised more, but I would like to understand exactly how it felt for you. Tell me."

Angel took a deep breath and explained what had happened when she had merged with her sisters on her arrival on the planet. When she had finished, she looked up at Alwyn, pleading, "Do you know why it happened like that? Why is it different now? Why do I remember, and why was I so angry? It scared me, Alwyn. I was so full of anger and power, I felt as if I could do anything, go anywhere. Why is this happening to me? Where does it come from?"

This was the first time Angel had admitted, even to herself, how much the merge had scared her. Until now she had pushed the memory of how it had made her feel deep down inside herself, hiding from it, and hiding it from her friends and family. Somehow she felt that Alwyn might have the knowledge and wisdom to help her deal with it.

Alwyn frowned and patted her hand again. After a few moments' silence he said, "Let me start with why this thing is different now to how it was before. When you and your sisters lived in this place," he waved at the walls of the library with his free hand, "Demon was the only one of you who was truly mature. She was your leader; she was the oldest, the big sister, the one who took care of you all. As such, the Vorlon chose her to carry the part of one of them that fueled the merge. Demon became the director of the fusion of power, taking the talent each of you brought as individuals, and combining it into one immensely powerful being. As the director, only she remembered what the merged entity had done, and those memories disturbed her deeply."

The Mage looked at Angel and smiled sadly, "I don't think any of you ever realized how deeply. She led you in rebellion against your masters, then suffered their punishments, and the guilt of seeing her sisters punished, too. But she held out and led you from the slavery to which the Vorlons would have subjected you, all the while unknowingly drawing on the power of that piece of the Vorlon that lived inside her.

"When that Vorlon went into hibernation, Demon lost much of her power. She gave it up willingly, for the peace of mind it brought her. But what she also gave up, without knowing it, was her ability to control the merge. That control fell to the next most powerful sister. It fell to you Angel, although you didn't know it until yesterday."

Angel nodded. What Alwyn said made sense. But there was much more she needed to know. "OK, Alwyn, I can accept that. But why have my powers being growing so fast? Why am I getting stronger all the time? And how do I control them? Demon has always been controlled, from the day we met, but I've never had to do that. How do I learn? It scares me, Alwyn. I'm scared I'll hurt someone."

Angel hadn't described her deepest fear. She never wanted anyone to know how she had felt when in control of the merge. She felt she must somehow be evil to want to destroy things, as she had when she had come together with her sisters.

Alwyn patted her hand again, and he tried to smile reassuringly. "You were very young when you came to this planet, Angel. You may have been physically mature, but in emotional terms, you still had a lot of growing up to do. You've been doing that these past few years, and in a very painful way. As you've matured emotionally, so your powers have matured with you. You are now a woman, Angel, and you have come into your own. Now you have to learn to control your powers, and not let them control you."

Angel gave Alwyn a sad smile. "Control has always been more Demon's thing than mine, Alwyn. I think she gets that from her mother's side, and I get my impulsiveness from *my* mother."

Alwyn frowned and narrowed his eyes as he looked at Angel. For a moment she saw a flicker of light flash across his pupils, but then it was gone as fast as it had come. As he continued to peer closely at her, Alwyn asked softly, "How much do you know about your mother, Angel? Who she was and where she came from."

Angel shrugged. It had been a long time since she'd thought about her mother. She wasn't sure she wanted to dredge up painful memories at this time, but if Alwyn thought it was important, she decided to tell him what she could.

"I don't know anything about where my mother came from. She never spoke about her family, not even to say where they lived, or where she was born. When I asked her, she'd just say the past wasn't important, that only today and tomorrow mattered."

Alwyn continued to watch her intensely as he asked, "What about your father? Did you know him at all?"

Angel shook her head. "He was gone before I was born. From the little Demon's told me about her childhood, I'd guess that he didn't want to leave her and her mother, but was forced to by the Vorlons. I don't think there's much doubt that he was one of their agents. He made the mistake of falling in love with Demon's mother, and it sounds like he loved Demon, too, but he was forced to leave them when he was ordered to impregnate my mother."

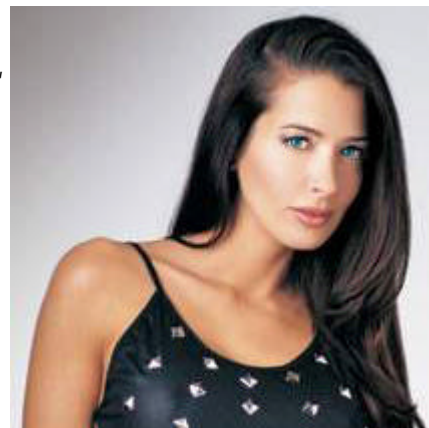
That thought made Angel angry. It wasn't fair. Demon had been the product of two people loving each other. Angel was just a breeding assignment. She wondered if that knowledge formed part of the resentment she had felt toward Demon in their early years together. Demon had been given so much, and Angel so little. It wasn't fair.

Pushing the emotions those thoughts produced to one side, Angel went on, "By the time I was born, my mother was alone, and that's how it stayed. We moved from place to place, never staying long. My mother worked when she could, and stole when she had to, to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. Sometimes she had boyfriends who helped us, but most of the time we looked out for ourselves."

Those years had been hard, but Angel remembered them fondly. While there had been little enough of anything else, she and her mother had shared love and happiness. Angel may never have spent long enough in any one school to make friends, but she didn't need them. She'd had her mother, and her mother had been the best friend anyone could ever have.

"We had a wonderful life together, constantly traveling, free and happy, until she got sick." Those memories were much darker, and again the anger built within Angel.

Why had her father given her mother nothing to live on? Demon and her mother had been left wealthy. Angel had received nothing. When her mother had gotten sick, Angel had started working in a restaurant at night after school, earning whatever she could to buy medicine for her mother. It hadn't been enough, and Angel's mother had died when she was fifteen.



The memory of the time she had stood beside her mother's grave made Angel bitterly angry. Her school had called in Child Welfare because of the time she had taken off to care for her sick mother. They had wanted to put her into foster care, but Angel had decided to run away. She'd had her rucksack packed and hidden behind a nearby gravestone, ready to leave the instant the service was over. Angel had had no idea where she was going to run, but she'd known she had to get away. No one was going to tie her down.

Pushing the anger aside, Angel went on, "After my mother died, Demon appeared out of nowhere. I'll never forget how she looked. Tall and cool, all dressed up in expensive black clothes, with a superior, snotty English accent. When I look back, I can't believe that she'd only just turned twenty-one. She looked and sounded so much more mature. She swept aside everyone's objections, and told them she was taking me home. No one dared disobey to the Ice Queen's orders."

Angel grinned as she remembered the Welfare worker's shocked expression when Demon had snatched his charge away from him. The next few days had been a blur, but Angel had finally found herself in England, in a comfortable home, with plenty of food, warmth, clothes and everything else she was ever likely to need. Of course, it was all because of her older sister's charity, and Angel remembered how much she had resented that at times.

She sighed as she went on, "Of course, I had to be different. Everyone else may have been scared of Demon, and secretly, I was, too. But I wouldn't let her see it, and I was a complete bitch to her, just to prove I wasn't intimidated by her."

Angel regretted some of the things she had done at that time in her life, particularly her actions in regard to David, the man Demon had loved. Angel had noticed the way David looked at her, and hadn't been able to resist flirting with him. She'd never intended it to go further, but one day when she was particularly angry with Demon about something trivial, David had come to the house and found Angel alone. She had decided that it really wasn't fair that Demon should have so much, and she should have so little, so Angel had deliberately set out to seduce the much older man. He'd needed very little encouragement, and soon Angel had found herself flat on her back on the kitchen table, with David thrusting into her.

She hadn't enjoyed the experience much. David hadn't been a particularly considerate lover, only caring for his own pleasure. When he'd finished, he'd collapsed on top of Angel, leaving her unsatisfied and frustrated. Of course, it was at that moment when Demon had walked in and caught them. Angel wondered whether it was her frustration that had been partly responsible for the way she had behaved then. David had fled, leaving the two sisters to confront each other.

Angel had never seen Demon so angry. She'd screamed and yelled at her younger sister, calling her every name under the sun. That had been Angel's first experience of Demon's extensive vocabulary of swearwords, and she'd been impressed, but inevitably, felt impelled to fight back. The verbal abuse had soon escalated into physical violence, ending when Demon had picked up a knife and flung it at her sister, cutting deep into her shoulder, creating the scar which Angel carried to this day.

Pulling herself back to the present, Angel smiled at Alwyn, and said, "There's not much more I can tell you about my family. Why? Is it important?"

Alwyn shrugged and leaned back in the sofa, closing his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, he frowned at Angel and said, "I have made some inquiries, and what I'm about to tell you is partly based on the evidence I have found, and partly on speculation. Understand that this is my interpretation of events. But I don't think I'm wrong."

Leaning forward, the Mage took Angel's hand again, and said, "The Vorlons and Shadows were at war for millions of years. The Vorlons represented control, while the Shadows believed in evolution through chaos. When Earth came to the attention of the disputants, they each approached humanity in their own way. The Vorlons started a number of breeding programs. The telepaths are the result of one of those programs, and you and your sisters come from another line.

"The Shadows took a different approach. They abducted humans, using them as the central processing units of their ships. Once integrated into a Shadow ship, the human was never the same. They were changed physically and psychologically. They could be removed from the ship, but the ship could never completely be removed from them."

Angel gazed at the Mage, feeling puzzled. What did Shadow ships have to do with her? She remained silent as Alwyn went on. "Sometimes the Shadows would release their abductees and take them back to Earth. Some of them were completely insane, but some managed to reintegrate themselves back into human society. Some of them went on to have children."

Alwyn took Angel's hand again, and held it gently as he said, "Angel, I've researched your genealogy. As far as I can trace, your mother, her mother, and every woman in your line of ancestors, for seven generations before you, had been abducted from Earth for a period of months, sometimes years. Each was returned with no memory of what had happened to them in their absence, but each would have been profoundly changed by their experiences, perhaps even at a genetic level. Each went on to have a single daughter, who like her mother, was again abducted. I think the Shadows were secretly copying the Vorlons. I think they had their own breeding program, intended to introduce the powers *they* wanted into the human gene pool. It was their way of opposing the Vorlons."

Angel's eyes were wide with shock and horror. Was that what she truly was? The product of a breeding program intended to create chaos? She knew the Shadows had been a force of great destruction in the galaxy. Was that what she had been created for? To destroy? To kill and annihilate everything around her? Somehow it made a horrible sort of sense. It explained the way she had felt when in control of the merge. And no wonder Lucas Buck, the epitome of evil, had seen her as the perfect mother for his heir.

Suddenly, Angel felt as if everything she had ever known about herself, believed about herself, had been undermined. She felt that she no longer knew who or what she was.

Alwyn had obviously sensed Angel's dismay at what she had just been told, as he pulled her into his arms, and held her gently, rocking her as a father would rock a distressed child. He patted her back and whispered, "Don't let it distress you too much, my dear. You are not just the product of your genes. You are a person in your own right, shaped by your experiences. You are much more than a machine made of flesh and blood, programmed by aliens to do their bidding. Your sister proved that when she led you in rebellion against the Vorlon."

Angel pushed herself away from the Mage, shaking her head. "I don't understand. If I'm the

product of a Shadow breeding program, why did the Vorlons abduct me? And why was my father one of their agents?"

Alwyn kept hold of Angel's hand, and continued to pat it gently as he said, "I believe the Vorlons subverted the Shadows' plans. They introduced a wild card into the game. They sent your father, who as you say, was one of their agents, to knock the Shadows' program off track. Then I think they watched you. As you grew up, they realized what a force they had created. I think they intended to take you and your sisters separately, forcing you together later in your lives, making you the weapon they most desired. But fate intervened.

"Demon was never supposed to know about you, until you were brought together later. She wasn't supposed to learn to love you. Demon was never supposed to know *how* to love. Everything in her upbringing was designed to make her cold and uncaring. You changed that in her, Angel. By meeting you when she did, by taking you in, caring for you, fighting you, hating you and loving you, Demon learned what it was like to feel for herself. Instead of just clinically noting and using the emotions of others, as the Vorlons had intended, Demon began to have feelings of her own again, for the first time since she was a child. It was those feelings that made her rebel, and you supported her in that rebellion, giving her the strength to defy the Vorlons."

Angel was mesmerized by what she was hearing as the Mage continued, "Without your intervention in Demon's life, Angel, none of your sisters would have the happiness they have today. Perhaps the Vorlons would have won the war against the Shadows, and the galaxy would be a very different place. We all have a lot to thank you for, Angel. You changed history."

The raven haired witch was struggling to take it all in. It was almost too much to comprehend. She forced herself back to the practicalities, taking a deep breath and saying, "OK, I'm going to need a little time to take all that in, but let's say you're right. What does this mean for me now? I still have this power, however I got it, and wherever it came from, although if it came from the Shadows, at least that explains the cold and darkness when we merged and the feelings I got..."

Angel broke off, unwilling to explain more. She started again. "How do I control it, Alwyn? I'm so afraid I'm going to hurt someone! How do I stop myself doing that?"

Alwyn squeezed her hand again. "I can help you with that. There are exercises Technomages perform to control the source of their power, which you can do, too. Our powers are technological in nature, while yours are genetic, but the powers come from the same source, so the exercises should still help. They promote control, and when the energy levels build too high, they allow you to diffuse the power in a non-destructive way."

Angel sighed with relief. It seemed there was hope after all. Sometimes she'd wondered if she would have to lock herself away from her friends and family, just to keep them safe. Now it seemed she would be able to carry on with her life, and to fulfill her dream of marrying the man she loved. She decided to think about Alwyn's comments that their powers came from the same source later. That wasn't something she wanted to deal with at that moment.

In her relief, Angel's sense of humor returned and she gave Alwyn a wicked little smile, peering up at him from under her lashes as she said, "I'm not so sure I like all this talk about control. I

really don't want to turn into a mini-Demon. I don't think the universe could stand two of her, do you?"

Alwyn roared with laughter and gently punched her arm. "You are a very naughty girl, and I think I'll have to ask this Jack Gideon fellow to punish you severely."

Angel's eyes sparkled with mischievous glee. "Promises, promises."

Demon watched her sister place the last of the tiny red rosebuds in her hair, before saying, "I think you look more beautiful today than I've ever seen you before," and smiling.

Angel met her sister's eyes in the mirror and smiled back, reaching up to touch the dark red net which captured her hair and held it resting against the back of her neck. "I like what Lily did to my hair. It keeps it neat and out of the way, and it will go beautifully with the dress. It suits you like that, too."

Demon touched the black net, identical to Angel's in everything but color, which held all her blonde curls neatly in place. She rarely bothered to do anything elaborate with her hair. If she didn't wear it loose, she normally just tied it back roughly into a pony-tail, or occasionally pulled it up with combs. She'd only agreed to let Lily do her hair and make-up because of the special occasion.

Lily had now moved on to Ilas, putting her bright blue hair up into a dark blue net, while Angel finished her own make-up. The sisters had gathered in Angel's rooms to help her get ready, before they had to leave to get themselves dressed.

Demon treasured these few moments alone with her younger sister. So much had happened since their arrival, they hadn't had a minute to themselves before now. The tall blonde reached up and smoothed a wayward hair on Angel's head back into place as she said, "You'll bowl Jack over. And all the other men, too."

Angel laughed. "There's only one man I want bowled over. The rest can stay standing. Although if I see Jack on his back, you know what will happen, don't you?" Her younger sister gave Demon a mischievous wink, making her laugh.

"Just try to keep your hands off him until the ceremony is over. It's not good form to start fucking each other in front of the guests. Although Matthew said he wanted to do just that at our wedding." Demon winked back.

Angel stopped laughing, and her eyes filled with sadness. "That was before I came along and ruined it for you both."

Demon leaned forward and took Angel into her arms, hugging her closely while being careful not to disturb her hair and make-up. [Lily will never forgive me if she has to do us both again!]

"Angel darling, you didn't ruin anything. It just made the ending a little dramatic, and left the restaurant where we were supposed to have the reception wondering what had happened." Demon smiled as she pushed her sister out at arms length and looked deep into her eyes. "And

getting you back--whatever the circumstances--was the best wedding gift anyone could have given me."

Angel gave a brave little smile, but Demon saw her sister's hand creep up to hold the crystal locket around her neck. Keeping her hand on Angel's arm, Demon sent, *[[Michael would be very happy for you today. He was a good man, and all he ever wanted was for you to be happy. He loved you very much. And so does Jack. I wish you could feel what I feel when he looks at you, Angel. Then you'd know just how much he loves you.]]*

Angel smiled and leaned forward to kiss Demon's cheek, as she sent, *[[Thank you, Demon, but I don't need to be an empath to feel Jack's love. I can feel it in his look, his touch, his kiss and most of all when we fuck like mad minks.]]*

Demon gave a very dirty chuckle, and slapped Angel's hand. The two sisters sat grinning at each other, until Lily and Ilas demanded to know what the joke was, and came over to join them.

As her younger sisters came together in a single embrace, Demon leaned back, separating herself. The last thing they needed was to accidentally merge. The tall blonde looked into the mirror and smiled at what she could see there. All four women had their hair styled in the same way, each with their locks held by a net in their signature color. Demon's net was black, Ilas' blue, Lily's green and Angel wore red. A darker red than her usual scarlet, to match the dark red of the dress she planned to wear.



Pushing aside her memories of other wedding days, Demon took a deep breath and said, "I think I'd better get going. I still have to get my two hellions dressed, tie Matthew's bow tie--he can never get it right--and finish getting myself ready. Angel, I'll bring Marcus back here in an hour. The shuttles have been going back and forth all afternoon, and everyone will be in the throne room ready by then."

Looking at her sisters and smiling, she said, "Come on, girls. It's show-time!"

Matt Gideon was struggling with Jack's bow tie, knowing he was making a complete mess of it. Then again, Jack hadn't done any better when he'd tried to help Matt. At this rate, they were both going to look ridiculous for the wedding, even if they didn't manage to strangle each other with the ties beforehand. Gideon muttered to himself, "Why did they have to insist on tuxedos? They know we look like penguins in them!"

Jack grinned, then half-choked as Matt pulled the tie too tight. He gasped out, "Angel said we look sexy in tuxedos. I think she's insane. Anyway, just be grateful we don't have to wear dress uniforms like poor John!" He put his hand up to stop Gideon throttling him, then turned back to the mirror to examine the result. "Matt, that looks worse than when I did it myself."

Gideon sighed. Jack was right. He stood alongside his doppelganger and they both looked in the mirror at each other. Both men were dressed in black dinner jackets and pants, with white wing collar shirts fastened by black enamel studs, dark red silk vests, and matching bow ties. Very badly tied bow ties.

"You're right. It does. In fact, it looks nearly as bad as mine." Gideon wrenched the tie from around his neck and glared at the limp piece of silk as it rested in his hand, almost defying him to take another try. "Deborah should be back soon. She's much better at it than I am. Let's leave them until she gets here."

Jack started yanking at his own tie, struggling with the double knot Matt had somehow managed to tie. Checking the time, he said, "She's cutting it fine, isn't she? There's less than an hour before the ceremony starts."

Gideon laughed. "That's one big difference between the sisters. I don't know about Ilas, but Lily and Angel always take hours getting ready for a party. Deborah takes about ten minutes. She always says she can never figure out what her sisters do with themselves. She took a shower before she left, pulled on an old pair of pants and shirt, and said when she got back she'd just need to put her dress on. What there is of it."

Gideon was still unsure how he felt about the outfits the sisters would be wearing. He hadn't seen Angel's dress, but he knew the other sisters planned to wear dresses that were identical to each other in style. All three were based on a dress he had seen Lily wear several times, although 'wear' seemed a bit of an exaggeration. There wasn't enough of the upper half of the dress to be actually 'worn'. The halter neck left the wearer's shoulders and back completely bare to below the level of the waist. The front was two strips of material, and Gideon hadn't figured out how the women managed to get them to stay in place.

When Deborah had modeled her dress for him, he'd watched with bated breath, ready to lunge forward and scoop her breasts back inside the dress at any moment. Sadly, the opportunity hadn't arisen, but Gideon knew he'd be on tenterhooks every instant Deborah wore the damned thing.

The amount of material in the skirt had more than made up for the lack of coverage on top. Deborah had kicked at the swirls of material impatiently, muttering about how she was bound to trip over it at some point. Then she had stooped and caught up a loop attached to the bottom of the skirt, allowing her to lift the train from the floor and control it a little better. As she'd stooped, Gideon had gazed with rapt attention as her breasts pressed against the thin strips of material restraining them, making it obvious that her nipples were standing to attention.

Gideon smiled to himself as he recalled asking his wife if she was cold. She'd grinned back and told him that she was in fact warm. Very, very warm. Gideon had then discovered what for him was the best thing about that dress. It was cut so low at the back, there was no possible way Deborah could wear panties. He'd lifted her skirts and taken her hard and fast, still standing, pressing her up against the wall. Fortunately, the dress hadn't been damaged in the process.

Jack's voice recalled Gideon to the present. "If you carry on like that you're going to need a cold shower."

Gideon laughed. "Was it that obvious? Well, just you wait until you see what the sisters have planned, and see if *you* can think of anything else. Although if you're anything like me on my wedding day, you won't even notice there's any other woman present. You'll just look at Angel."

Jack grinned back, and Gideon shook his head ruefully. "It's a damned shame though. You'll be

missing quite a show."

Before Jack could answer the door burst open and Gideon's children rushed in, closely followed by their mother.

Mattie yelled out, "Daddy, Daddy! Look at me! Mummy says I'm pretty!"

Gideon grabbed his daughter and swung her up into the air, making her scream with delight. "You're always pretty, pumpkin, it's just that most of the time you hide it well under layers of dirt!" Mattie giggled as her father went on, "But you certainly scrubbed up good."

Mattie was wearing a black velvet dress, white knee high socks and shiny black shoes. Her blonde curls shone as they cascaded down her back, held back by a black velvet headband. Gideon thought he had never seen his daughter look so much like a girl. He couldn't remember the last time they had managed to get her into a dress. Today was certainly a day to remember.

Putting his daughter down, and telling her to go sit quietly on the sofa, and not get dirty, Gideon turned his attention to his son. "And you cleaned up pretty well, too, Marcus. You look good."

Marcus tugged at his jacket a little self-consciously. "Mum had to tie my bow tie for me. I couldn't figure out how to do it." The eleven year old wore a tuxedo identical to his father's in everything but size, with the same dark red silk vest and bow tie. The main difference was that his bow was neat and tidy.

Gideon grinned down at his son, and gently ruffled his hair. "If you ever figure it out, you can tell me and your Uncle Jack."

While he had been focused on his children, Deborah had been busy with Jack, who now turned, his bow tie perfectly aligned.

Deborah smiled at them all, and said, "Can you two watch the children while I dress? Don't let them out onto the terrace, don't let them touch anything that might get them dirty, in fact, don't let them move." She turned and started toward the bedroom, then paused and looked over her shoulder saying, "And the same goes for you two. Marcus, make sure your father and Uncle Jack don't get into any trouble for the next ten minutes, will you?" With that, she swept into the bedroom and pushed the door closed behind her.

Gideon looked from Jack to Marcus and over to Mattie. Within seconds all four of them were trying to stifle hysterical laughter. Marcus had a cushion stuffed in his mouth to muffle his giggles, while Jack and Gideon had both covered their mouths. Mattie gave up the struggle and started to shriek loudly. Before she could get over-excited, Gideon swooped and lifted her into his arms, hugging her tightly.

"OK, pumpkin, calm down. Now you two, stay with your Uncle Jack, while I go and face your mother. She seems to have forgotten that I have a tie that needs tying, too."

Leaving the three of them to their laughter, Gideon moved to the door of the bedroom, opening it quietly. He slipped inside, closing the door behind him, and was greeted by a sight that knocked the laughter out of him and left him gasping for air.

Deborah sat on the bed, naked except for her black silk stockings with the lace tops that Gideon adored. He almost forgot to breathe as she lifted her leg, pulling the second stocking into place. His wife looked up at him as he stood silently in the doorway and winked, "Shall I bother with the dress? Or shall I just put my shoes on and go down like this? That would cause a stir, wouldn't it?"

Gideon chuckled. "Damn right it would. Angel would never forgive you for upstaging her. So be a good girl and get dressed. If you don't, I won't get chance to peel that dress right off you and spank you for being naughty, later."

Deborah licked her lips, and the sight of her naked body, with her mischievous smile, was enough to make Gideon's cock twitch in his pants. He groaned quietly. "Please, Deborah, put your clothes on, or I'm going to be limping down to the throne room, and suffering all the way through the ceremony. You wouldn't be that cruel, would you?"

Lifting herself to her feet, Deborah walked slowly toward Gideon, swaying her hips as she walked in a way that only increased his distress. He groaned again as she leaned into him, pressing her naked breasts into his chest. He started to lean forward to kiss her, but she put her finger on his lips and shook her head.

"Uh uh, no kissing. Lily will kill me if I mess up the make-up she made me wear. Now hold still."

Gideon got his revenge by sliding his hands down Deborah's sides, moving them to her butt and pulling her hard against him, as she tied his bow tie. When she'd finished, he reached up and tweaked her nipple, enjoying the little squeak of pleasure his wife emitted in response.

He watched as she turned and walked to the wardrobe, where she quickly stepped into her dress, ducking to pull the halter neck into place. Then she reached inside the top of the dress, adjusting her breasts until somehow they were settled into place, the center part of each one covered by the material, but the cleavage being cut low enough to display the beautiful shape of her body.

Quickly pulling on her sandals, Deborah then turned and grinned at Gideon as he stared at her, awed by her beauty, wondering as he so often did what he had done to deserve having this amazing woman love him so much. Moving over to him, Deborah touched his chin with her finger, gently shutting his open mouth. Then she barely brushed her lips against his, saying softly, "Shall we go? We need to drop Mattie off with Naima and the girls, then you and Jack can go downstairs, while I take Marcus along to Angel's room."

Gideon held her back for a second, drinking in the sight of her. He reached up and touched a curl of hair that had slipped from the net restraining it, and said, quietly, "Jack thinks he's the luckiest man in the universe today. He's not quite right. He's one of the two luckiest men in the universe. Let's go."

Gideon lifted his wife's hand to his lips, then placed it on his arm, leading her from the room.

"Gosh, Auntie Angel, you look fantastic!" Angel couldn't help but smile at Marcus' enthusiasm. She smoothed down the black velvet bodice of her dress and smiled again. She'd loved this dress

from the first time she'd seen it. It was cut wide and low across the shoulders, displaying a generous amount of cleavage, with a gold embroidered panel of red velvet cut in above the black around the neck. The sleeves were tight from shoulder to elbow, made from the same gold embroidered red velvet. Below the elbow the sleeves were cut wide and long, the plain dark red velvet falling in swathes almost to the floor.

The dress had originally been designed for an elf princess in a movie, and wearing it made Angel feel like a princess for the day. She had put aside all the fears that her earlier discussion with Alwyn had provoked, and she was now determined that she was going to enjoy herself. She smiled down at her nephew and said, "Thank you, Marcus. It's a pretty dress, isn't it?"

Marcus grinned back up at her, and said, "Yes, but it wouldn't look as nice on anyone else. I think you'll be the prettiest lady at the wedding."

Angel laughed, feeling almost giddy with happiness. "That's the bride's prerogative, Marcus." When her nephew looked puzzled, she explained, "The bride is supposed to be the prettiest girl present. If any other women outshine her, then it's your job to send them away."

Marcus looked fierce for a moment, and Angel realized he'd taken her joke seriously. She was about to explain, when his face cleared and he grinned again. "That's OK, Auntie Angel. It's not going to happen. You look too good for that. No one could be prettier. "

Angel laughed again, and picked up her bouquet. It was a simple posy of dark red rosebuds, matching the ones she wore in her hair. Moving around Marcus until she stood on his left, Angel said, "Now, lift your left arm out a little so I can hold onto it. Remember, when we get to the front of the room, Jack and your father will be waiting there. You take my right hand, and place it in Jack's left hand, OK? Then you step back and go to sit next to your mother, who'll be waiting in the front row with an empty chair next to her. Got it?"

Marcus nodded, his face set in determination to do a good job. Angel smiled and resisted the temptation to ruffle his curls. Her nephew was being a man for the day, and she shouldn't patronize him. He stuck his left elbow out a little awkwardly, then grinned up at Angel. "Come on then. I'll try hard not to trip over your dress."

Angel giggled and whispered, "Me too!" as she allowed Marcus to lead her from the room.

Descending the great staircase into the hallway, then walking slowly toward the door of the throne room, Angel's mind was racing. She couldn't help remembering another day when she had walked down a flight of stairs to marry the man waiting for her. Memories of Michael swept through her mind, happy times and sad, and for a moment, tears threatened to well up into her eyes. Her left hand crept up to touch the crystal locket at her neck, the only jewelry she wore that day.

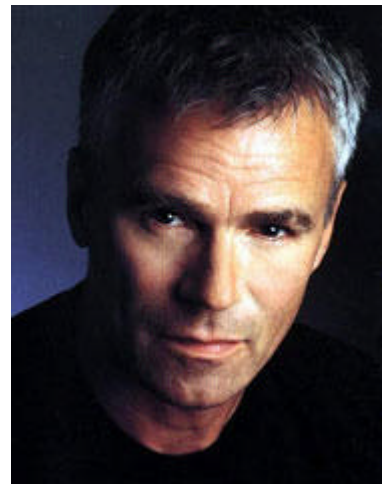
[I still love you, Michael. A part of me will always love you.] Angel sent the thought out into the universe, hoping that somehow Michael would hear her and understand. A wave of comfort and love startled Angel into thinking, just for a moment, that Michael had responded. Then she realized that Marcus was looking up at her anxiously.

Her empathic nephew had felt her momentary sadness, and sent a wave of love to reassure her. Angel sniffed back the tears and smiled down at Marcus reassuringly. "Thank you, sweetheart, that was kind. But I'm fine now, honest."

Marcus looked back at her, his expression puzzled. "Thanks for what? I didn't do anything."

Angel suddenly understood. Marcus hadn't sent that wave of love. She had no idea how it had happened, but somehow, Michael had blessed her and what she was about to do. Holding her chin up high, Angel smiled brightly as she approached the doors, knowing that this was going to be the best day of her life.

Max and Luke stood on either side of the closed doors, both grinning widely as Angel and Marcus approached. They bowed in perfect unison, then each grasped a door handle and threw open the doors into the throne room.



Angel almost gasped as she entered. The room had been transformed. The previously vast open space was crowded with people, sitting in rows on either side of a central aisle. At the end of every row, a pillar of flowers gave both color and scent to the room, while music was playing softly from the minstrels' gallery overhead. All the people rose to their feet as she and Marcus slowly made their way down the center of the room.

Smiling so widely her face almost hurt, Angel nodded at G'Tan, who stood next to No'Kar and all the other Narn marines. The sergeant looked magnificent in the jeweled splendor of his Narn finery, and he bowed his head and grinned as Angel slowly moved by. Then there was Sangeetha Siddhartha, who stood next to Andrew Roberts, resplendent in his dress uniform, while the tiny Lieutenant at his side wore the most gorgeous bright blue sari.

A couple of rows further forward stood Harry. Angel had no idea how they had done it, but somehow her sisters had managed to find a tuxedo that fitted the big man. His white shirt gleamed, and he wore a red silk vest and bow tie, silently proclaiming that he, too, was a member of the wedding party. Harry almost glowed with pride, as he held Baby tightly in his arms, obviously determined that the little dog would behave himself at the wedding. Angel almost laughed aloud as she saw that Harry had tied a red silk bow to Baby's collar. Baby was as well dressed as all the other guests.

All her family, her friends from the Excalibur, and from the village, lined the rows and smiled at Angel as she passed. She looked from side to side, smiling and nodding, her heart almost bursting with happiness to see so many happy people gathered together, all there to wish her joy.

At the front of the room, Lily sat on one side of the aisle, with Dureena and Ilas next to her, and their children sitting beyond the two empty chairs that awaited Luke and Max. On the other side of the aisle sat Demon and Mattie, with the empty chair where Marcus would join them, and Alwyn, wearing his most magnificent Technomage robes, Sarah and Jaysen sitting beyond them.

Dragging her attention away from the sides, Angel looked toward the front of the room, and for a moment she caught her breath. The dais had been cleared of the thrones that normally occupied the space. Now, under a red silk awning hung with thousands more flowers, three men stood waiting for her.

John stood in the center, smiling nervously, looking every inch the Captain in his dress uniform. Standing to the right of the dais were Jack and Matt Gideon. Two men, identical in almost every way, both of whom Angel loved deeply. She looked from one to the other, thinking that they had never looked so handsome, while her inner voice whispered, [But they wouldn't look so good if Demon hadn't tied their bow ties for them!]

Angel gave a tiny giggle, making Marcus look up at her in surprise. She looked back down at him and winked. Her nephew grinned back, then allowed his face to fall into more serious lines. Frowning in concentration, Marcus carefully executed the maneuver Angel had described. Jack had taken a small step forward, holding out his left hand. Marcus carefully slipped his arm from Angel's grasp, then took her right hand in his, before placing it gently into Jack's waiting palm. The boy looked from Angel to Jack and back, his face breaking into a huge grin as he stepped back, bowed proudly, then moved to join his mother and sister.

Angel wanted to cheer. Marcus had carried out his duties perfectly. Now all that remained was for her to do the same. Smiling, she turned her gaze to meet Jack's, and for a moment she felt as if she was drowning. The love she could see in Jack's warm, hazel eyes was almost overwhelming.

In that moment, Angel knew she was the luckiest woman in the universe, and she and Jack would spend the rest of their lives together.

Jack Gideon sipped at his wine, watching the crowds of people in the great dining hall. The party was in full swing and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. He'd been somewhat nervous when he'd realized that after the dinner, he'd been expected to lead Angel out into the middle of the hall and start the dancing.

Fortunately, whoever had picked the music had been kind to him and had chosen a slow piece. This allowed him to use his usual style of dancing, although for once he didn't actually grab Angelique's ass as he shuffled from foot to foot. Jack had been hugely relieved when John and Lily had moved out to join them, although he'd been a little startled to see what a great dancer John was. Jack wondered what other talents John had been hiding from him, then pushed those thoughts aside, as the sorrow at the loss of his friend in his own universe threatened to spoil his happiness.

After shuffling to another couple of tunes, Jack had felt his shoulder being tapped, and he turned to see another face he recognized smiling at him. Andrew Roberts had been a junior lieutenant on Jack's Excalibur, and he quickly pushed aside the memory of how 'his' Lieutenant Roberts had died. Andrew had smiled at Jack and asked if he could cut in. Jack had gladly handed Angelique over to someone who a) he knew was gay and b) he could see would dance with her properly. It was only walking away that it had suddenly struck him to wonder if *this* Lt. Roberts was gay. The Andrew Roberts from Jack's universe had been, but could this be one of those tiny ways in which the universes differed?

So now Jack stood watching with narrowed eyes as Roberts waltzed Angelique expertly around the room. Looking at the way Roberts held her, Jack realized he was being stupid. Roberts wasn't even trying to grope Angelique, and any red blooded heterosexual male couldn't have helped himself. Jack's bride was smiling happily and she had never looked more beautiful. The

dress she wore was less revealing than many of her outfits, but perfect for the occasion. Jack couldn't have been happier, and all because of Angelique's obvious joy. This is how he always wanted her to feel; loved, cherished and happy.

He was enjoying watching the dancers when he felt a hand on his arm, and turned to see G'Tan standing at his side. Jack had only met the large Narn marine sergeant briefly when he'd been on board the Excalibur. He didn't exactly treasure the memory of dangling from G'Tan's hands outside the Captain's quarters, but he knew the marine had only been doing his job: protecting his Captain's wife and apprehending a prisoner who had escaped from Medbay.

Jack lifted his glass in a silent toast to the Narn, then asked, "Are you enjoying the party?"

G'Tan smiled and nodded. "Very much. It's a wonderful opportunity to see all of our friends for what may be the last time."

Jack looked puzzled and listened while G'Tan explained. "My government has recalled me and my marines. We have now spent over ten years on board the Excalibur, and the Kha'ri has decided that it is time for others to take over from us. We will all be returning to Narn in a few weeks time."

The Narn didn't look exactly happy about the prospect, so Jack asked, "And what are your plans when you get there?"

G'Tan sighed, taking a sip of his drink before he said, "Some of the others are planning to take retirement, buy a farm and raise the children. This is good, as they are no longer pouchlings, and will soon be old enough to choose their names. It is time for them to return to the home of our ancestors, to help make it once again the paradise it was before Centauri came."

Jack nodded, then asked, "And you? You said 'some of the others' were planning on retirement, but what about you?"

G'Tan sighed again. "I don't know. No'Kar and I have decided that whatever we do, we will remain together. We are used to each others' ways and would miss the company." The leer G'Tan gave Jack showed that it was more than the company the two Narns would miss, and he chuckled as G'Tan went on. "Perhaps we will stay in the military and seek service somewhere together, or perhaps we will ask the ISA if they can find a use for a pair of old Narn fighters. We still have a few weeks to decide."

Jack was puzzled by something G'Tan has said. He wondered for a moment if he should ask what could be a very personal question, then decided that if he offended the Narn, he'd apologize later. Curiosity always had been his worst vice. Taking a deep breath, he asked, "OK, just one thing that puzzles me. You and No'Kar. You...well...you implied that you and she..."

Jack trailed off as G'Tan raised an eyebrow and chuckled, "That we engage in procreative activities for the purpose of pleasure?"

Half-laughing, Jack nodded. "Yes, if you want to put it that way. The thing is, I always thought that if Narns...indulged in such activities, there were always consequences, in the form of lots of little Narns. Or did I get that wrong?"

G'Tan smiled. "You're quite correct, which is why we have been raising a family with eleven pouchlings on board the Excalibur for the last nine years. However, when a male reaches an age where he can no longer carry pouchlings, his metabolism changes and he ceases to produce viable seed with which to fertilize the female. It is an age that male Narns look forward to with great anticipation. I was fortunate enough to reach that part of my life last year. This means that I am now in much demand amongst the females of my species on board the Excalibur."

Jack laughed again. "I bet you are! And how does No'Kar feel about that?"

G'Tan sighed, then grinned and winked. "Why do you think she doesn't want us to go back to Narn?"

The two men laughed together, then the Narn sergeant shook himself, smiling broadly at Jack. "Whatever we decide to do, it is good that we had this chance to see so many of our old friends. For that I thank you, Jack Gideon. We are in your debt."

G'Tan bowed and touched his forehead in the Narn gesture of respect, and Jack returned the salute. He had become accustomed to seeing Narns around the galaxy in his years of trading, but it still made him sad to think that this proud and vital species had been exterminated in his own universe, along with so much else that was good.

As G'Tan moved away to join the ladies, Matt Gideon sidled up next to Jack and nodded at the dance floor, where Angelique was now dancing with Harry. The big man looked as if he couldn't decide whether he was proud or terrified, but he held Angelique in his arms as if she was a fragile and precious piece of porcelain that he might break. Jack was slightly miffed to note that even Harry was a better dancer than he was.

Matt's smile was slightly malicious as he said, "This is one thing you're going to have to get used to. Angel loves to dance and Roberts won't always be around to cut in and rescue you."

Jack groaned quietly. "I know. I also hear you got lucky enough to marry a woman who hates to dance as much as you do." Jack nodded over to where Demon sat, now chatting with G'Tan and No'Kar.

Matt grinned. "I am very happy to say that my wife has two left feet. Very pretty feet, but she can't dance to save her life. It's one of the things I love most about her."

Jack laughed at Matt's delight, then listened as he went on, "Come over here for a minute. I know the wine is good, but Max has brought something a little stronger. Want to join us?"

Raising an eyebrow, Jack abandoned his glass and followed Matt to the side of the room, where Alwyn stood with John, Max and Luke. Alwyn had abandoned his robes, and now stood wearing a more normal shirt and pants. John had loosened the neck of his uniform, while the other men had all untied their bow ties, which now hung draped loosely around their necks. Max had even removed his jacket, and now stood with his white dress shirt open at the neck. With a sigh of relief, Jack reached up and unfastened his tie.

Max reached behind his back and produced a bottle of Laphraoig. Jack peered at the label and saw that it was over twenty years old. He whistled softly, and eagerly held out the empty glass Alwyn had given him. Max splashed in a generous measure, then lifted his own glass in a toast. "To the bride and groom."

Jack waited while the others joined in the toast, then acknowledged them and took a sip, closing his eyes as he savored the taste. It was like liquid gold sliding over his tongue and tonsils. He hadn't tasted such good Scotch in years. When he opened his eyes again he grinned at Max and said, "You'll have to tell me where you get your supply. I could make a fortune shipping this stuff."



Max laughed and said they'd discuss it later, along with his commission. Jack shook his head. This Max wasn't very different to the man he'd known in his own universe. He was about to say as much when he became aware of something soft and warm leaning against his leg. He looked down to see Baby looking up at him adoringly.

The other men all started to laugh as they became aware of the little dog at Jack's feet, and Luke chuckled, saying, "I think you have a fan there, Jack."

Jack sighed. "He follows me around like a shadow! Everywhere I turn, there are two doggy brown eyes staring up at me. He even tracked us down last night and tried to get into bed with us! Why me? He's supposed to be Angelique's dog, or maybe Harry's, but definitely not mine!"

As the other men laughed again, Jack glared down at the devoted puppy and said, "Go away." Even to his own ears, the order didn't have a ring of sincerity. Baby happily ignored him, and Jack sighed.

Matt Gideon chuckled again, saying, "Ignore him, Jack, and maybe he'll go away on his own. Maybe."

Jack decided that Matt was definitely having too much fun at his expense that evening, so decided to get some of his own back. "I'll do that. And while I'm doing it, I'll propose another toast, if Max will be so kind as to do the honors."

He looked quizzically at Max, who sighed histrionically, then refilled everyone's glasses. Jack lifted his, and said, "We've toasted the bride and groom, so it's time to start on the rest of the family. There's an old toast I heard once, from an Irishman I used to know. I think it suits someone here perfectly."

Jack could see from Matt's narrowed eyes that his doppelganger suspected what he was about to do, so before Matt could intervene, Jack forged on:

"Here's to the lady who dresses in black,
who always looks sweet and never looks slack.
And when she kisses, she kisses so sweet,
she makes things stand that have no feet."

Alwyn roared with laughter, while John, Max and Luke all chuckled and looked at Matt. Before Matt could respond, Alwyn butted in, "But that's not a wedding toast! No, we can't have that. I insist on proposing another toast to the bride and groom:

May your wedding night be like a kitchen table...
all legs and no drawers."

Jack laughed and winked at Matt, who leaned over and whispered, "I think I'll tell Deborah about your toast. She's heard it before from me, but I'll be interested to see how she reacts when she hears that you gave it. You should be worried, you know. She's fast and she's got absolutely no scruples about attacking a man in his most vulnerable parts. Get G'Tan to tell you about her knife throwing sometime."

Matt's smile had widened, and Jack decided the only safe reply was, "Angelique will protect me."

He grinned before turning to listen to Max proposing the next toast.

"Here's to that girl who offers her honor.
For all night long I'll be off her and on her."

The toasts got increasingly outrageous as the contents of the bottle went down, and Jack started to feel decidedly mellow. He decided it was time to return to the party, before he drank enough to make him incapable. He couldn't resist one last toast before he left.

"OK, guys, I'm going to see if Angelique has had enough dancing, and take her off to bed. Before I go, I'll just say this:

Here's to the girl I love the best.
I've loved her naked, and I've loved her dressed.
I've loved her standing and I've loved her lying.
And if she had wings, I'd love her flying.

To my very own angel, Angelique Gideon. May she always be happy."

Max, John, Luke, Matt and Alwyn all raised their glasses and said in unison. "To Angelique. Long life and happiness."

"Angelique, what are you doing in there?" Jack rattled the doorknob as he yelled through the door.

Angelique's voice came back soft and muffled. "Just hold on for a bit, will you? It's a surprise."

Jack muttered to himself, "You bet it's a surprise. It's one hell of a surprise to find myself locked out of the bedroom on my wedding night!"

Looking down at Baby, who stood at his side, wagging his tail and with his tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth, Jack could have sworn the little dog was laughing at him. He glared down, saying, "OK, laugh it up. It's easy enough for you, isn't it? You don't have to worry about courting a lady, buying her flowers, going through all the steps of wooing her before doing her. You just get the scent in your nose, find the source, jump on board, then wham, bam, thank you ma'am, you're all done. I think I'll come back as a dog next time around."

Slouching across the living area of the rooms he was supposed to be sharing with Angelique, Jack dropped himself heavily onto the sofa. Baby immediately jumped up onto Jack's lap, his paws landing close to a very vulnerable area. Jack moved the dog into a more comfortable position, grinning as he said, "Watch the family jewels, OK? I still hope to find a use for them

before the night is out."

Jack lay back with one arm behind his head, his other hand playing with Baby's ear. He grinned down at the small dog, and said, "That's another reason you really don't want to come and live with me and Angelique. For you, there'd be no tail within light years. You'd have a choice between crossing your legs, humping legs and cushions, or letting us remove your favorite assets. Somehow I don't think you'd enjoy the last option, would you?"

Baby gazed up at him adoringly, then sneezed, which Jack took as the dog's complete contempt for the possibility of castration. Jack laughed and said, "I couldn't agree more. Males should always hang on to their balls, particularly if they're lucky enough to be able to lick them. Of course, it's even better if you can get someone else to do it for you..."

Staring at the door to the bedroom, Jack wondered just how long it would be before he'd be allowed into the bedroom. When he had left the stag party in the corner of the great hall, Jack had cut in on Angelique, who had been dancing with G'Tan by then. The big Narn had danced lightly and held Angelique firmly in his arms as he'd steered her around the floor. For a moment, Jack had wondered if he and Matt were the only two men left in the universe who couldn't dance.

G'Tan had relinquished his hold on the bride, bowing deeply as he handed her over to her new husband. Smiling down at her, Jack had asked whether she was ready for bed. The look Angelique had given him through her long, dark lashes had left Jack weak at the knees, as she nodded eagerly, and said, "I have a surprise for you upstairs."

If Jack had had his own way, he'd have just lifted her into his arms and run straight up the stairs with her, but of course nothing was that simple. Before they could leave, everyone had gathered at the foot of the stairs to cheer them on, making various lewd and lascivious comments to encourage them.

Angelique had played to the crowd, and the two of them had slowly ascended the staircase, pausing half way up so Angelique could throw her bouquet. It had been caught by a rather startled looking No'Kar, who had held the small posy in her large spotted hands, looking as if she didn't quite know what to do with it. The last thing Jack had seen before turning the corner at the top of the stairs was the rather startled expression on the Narn woman's face as Demon had whispered in her ear. Jack guessed that Demon had been enlightening No'Kar as to the implications of catching the bride's bouquet.

Arriving in their rooms, Jack had started to kiss Angelique passionately, his hands moving around her beautiful body, trying to find the fastenings of her dress. Angelique had responded as eagerly as ever, her hands too finding their way to all the places on Jack's body that aroused him most quickly. Within minutes, he had been panting with desire, and ready to abandon the fastenings to her dress. He'd just decided to give up, toss her on the bed and flip the skirt up, when Angelique had pulled away.

The crystal blue of her eyes was almost swallowed in the black of her pupils, dilated by desire, and the look Angelique had given Jack had lifted his temperature another notch. Then she said in a voice made husky by arousal, "I won't be long. Wait here."

Before Jack could move, she had slipped through the door from the living room to the bedroom, and locked the door behind her. Jack had stared at the door for a moment, completely

dumbfounded. His groin ached with an erection so hard he thought he might explode, and she told him to wait? Didn't she know she could kill a man like that?

Jack had wondered how Angelique would feel if she came back in and found him dead on the floor, having expired from a lust induced heart attack. He was about to yell through the door and tell her about the risk she ran, when he'd been distracted by a scratching at the door from the corridor. This time he had recognized it. Baby was back.

So now the two of them lay on the sofa and waited for Angelique to finish whatever her surprise was. Jack looked up abruptly as he heard the click of the lock on the bedroom door. Angelique's voice was faint but quite audible as she called, "You can come in now."

Jack looked down at Baby and grinned. "Sorry, pup. There's no way you're coming in there with me." He stood and carried the dog to his bed in the corner, placing him gently on top of the blanket. Baby laid down, his tail thumping against his bed, his mouth again hanging open in a grin that seemed to say, 'Go for it!'

Giving the puppy a knowing wink, Jack turned and made his way to the bedroom door. He threw it open dramatically, then stopped as if turned to stone. The lights in the bedroom were turned down low, but there was still plenty of illumination for him to see the prize that awaited him.

Angelique knelt on a soft rug in front of a blazing fire. The light from the flames sent flickers of gold across her pale skin, and there was a great deal of that skin on display. Jack's erection, which had subsided while he'd waited in the living room, exploded back into life with such force that he wondered whether the zipper of his pants could stand the strain.

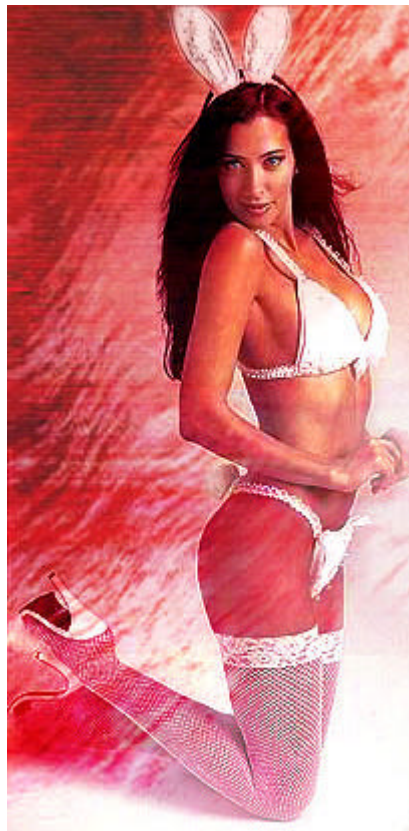
The outfit Angelique wore was innocent, sexy and very silly indeed, somehow all at the same time. Jack wasn't sure whether he wanted to laugh, howl or drop to his knees and worship her, and he stood frozen, trying to figure out if he could actually do all three at the same time.

Unaware of his inner turmoil, Angelique gave him another of those incredible looks, turning slightly to peer up at him over her shoulder. "Well? What do you think?" she asked.

Jack opened his mouth and closed it again. He was completely unable to think, never mind form a coherent sentence. He sensed Angelique was getting a little impatient as she asked, "Do you like it? You said that we're as bad as bunnies, so I thought..."

Angelique trailed off as Jack started to laugh. As she had turned away he had caught sight of the little fluffy bunny tail attached to the back of her panties. That, combined with the bunny ears, was just too much for him.

As he started to laugh, Angelique pouted and began to look upset. Her bottom lip quivered a little as she said, "It was supposed to be sexy, not funny!"



Jack couldn't hold himself back any longer. Rushing across the bedroom, he dropped to his knees in front of her, taking her hands in his and kissing them reverently. His eyes ran up and down her exquisite body, which the stockings, bra and panties displayed so deliciously and said, "It is very sexy indeed, and any second now, I'm going to find out how long it takes to get you out of those panties, then I'm going to snack on a little rabbit for my dinner."

He gave Angelique a very lewd leer, then moved his hand to her hips and started tugging at her panties. Angelique giggled, and lifted her arms, moving to take off the bunny ears. Jack stopped her quickly. "Oh no. You put them on, you leave them on. The only things coming off are the panties. Everything else stays in place. I want to make love to you with your stockings and bunny ears on."

Angelique started to laugh, but didn't resist as Jack pushed her back gently until she was laid full length on the rug in front of the fire. Then he pulled off her panties, and sat upright to take in the glorious sight laid out before him.

His new wife laid on the rug, the firelight caressing her skin, her white stockings hugging her thighs, while between them, the nest of dark curls seemed to beckon Jack, calling to him, begging him to open those thighs and taste the honey contained between them.

Jack quickly stripped himself of his clothes, and lay down naked beside Angelique on the rug. She reached for his aching erection, but Jack blocked her hand. "Uh uh. Not yet. You don't get to touch or taste that until I've made you come three times. Starting now."

Sliding his hand between Angelique's thighs, Jack eased them apart, starting to stroke her curls, then slipping his finger gently into the warm, wet haven of her vagina. She moaned softly, closing her eyes and arching her back, inviting Jack to penetrate her more deeply as she opened her legs wider for him.

Jack smiled to himself. It was going to be a long night, and he'd give good odds that they'd both be sore and limping in the morning. Life was good.

Demon and Matthew made their way back up to the castle from the landing area in the early hours of the morning. They had just waved the last shuttle off, and said goodbye to the last of the guests from the Excalibur. The tall blonde gave a huge yawn, and snuggled more tightly against the warmth of her husband's arm, shivering a little in the cold of the night.

Matthew sighed, "I told you it was cold out here. You should have worn a wrap. Here."

Taking his jacket off, Matthew draped it around Demon's bare shoulders. It was warm and soft, and smelled of Matthew. Rubbing her cheek against the material, Demon looked up at her husband and smiled. "Thank you."

He laughed quietly and again put his arm around Demon's waist, pulling her close to his side as they walked together in comfortable silence. As they crossed the drawbridge and walked on into the courtyard, Demon could see that all the torches that illuminated the area were now burning low, and would soon go out. It had been a long night but a good one.

Looking up at Matthew, Demon asked, "Did you have a good time? I think everyone enjoyed

themselves."

Matthew paused at the castle entrance, turning Demon to face him. He smiled at her, his eyes full of love and mischief as he said, "It was a great party, but I'm glad it's over. Now I get to have you to myself for a while. I hope you're not too tired, because I'm in the mood for a little fooling around."

Demon chuckled, and put her arms around his neck, pulling him down into a long, slow kiss. When she finally released him, she said, "Have you ever known me to be too tired for that?"

Looking up across the courtyard, she could see a soft, flickering light glowing from the window of the bedroom Jack and Angel were sharing. Nodding in its direction, Demon whispered, "I doubt if they need any help, but we could always try and give them a little boost. They've been up there for hours now, so their energy might be flagging a bit."

Matthew gave a throaty laugh, and Demon could feel his arousal where his groin was pressed against hers. "It's the least we can do for them. We'll consider it a kind of belated wedding present."

Demon followed eagerly as Matthew led the way to their rooms. She grinned to herself, thinking that if Matthew really got her going again, it wouldn't just be the newly weds who would be limping in the morning.

10th July 2280

Angel sat at the breakfast table, holding Jack's hand, smiling as she listened to the conversations going on around the table. All the adults had gathered for breakfast, with Ilas and Max whispering together, while Dureena talked intently in quiet tones to Sarah. Lily had finished eating and was braiding Naima's flaming red hair, while her daughter waited impatiently to join her friends. The children had gathered in a huddle by the great fireplace, intent on some game the rules to which were understood only by them. Alwyn looked on with an avuncular smile on his face, while John and Luke watched Lily, with smiles that showed how much they adored their little redhead.

At that moment, Matt and Demon entered the room, and went to the sideboard to help themselves from the breakfast dishes laid out there. Matt grumbled that they'd have to get down earlier the next day, before the locusts descended, and carried his plate over to the large dining table where the other adults sat. As her older sister and brother-in-law sat down to eat, Angel nodded to them and smiled, thinking that she could guess exactly why they were so late in arriving for breakfast. Angel and Jack had thought they would be last down, having slept long and late after a night of passionate activity. Angel's body ached, and she had to make an effort not to limp when she walked, but she had never felt happier or more content.

She and Jack had spent nearly the entire previous day in their bedroom, only emerging into their living area when a discrete knock at the door advised them that food and drink had been delivered. At those times they had scampered into the living room, still naked, turning meal times into more love making games. Angel felt her cheeks flush as she remembered what Jack had done with a peeled banana and how he had insisted on eating it.

Glancing up, Angel caught Demon's eye and realized that her older sister was watching her, and had seen the flush in her cheeks. Demon gave a wink that made it clear she had guessed the source of Angel's sudden rush of heat. Angel grinned back and shifted in her seat, moving her weight to an area of her ass that was a little less tender. She quickly pushed aside delicious memories of being thoroughly spanked, before they produced another rush of blood to her cheeks. All four of them.

Angel winced slightly as a shriek split the air, and she watched as Matt tried to calm his over-excited daughter. The little girl had leaped up from the huddle of other children, screaming with excitement at the outcome of their game. The noise of happy children playing was beginning to wear on Angel, and looking across at Jack, she could see from his pained wince that he felt the same. She was just wondering whether to suggest that they withdraw to their rooms again, when Demon leaned her head on her hands and sighed, saying, "If they go on making this much noise, I think I'm going to ask Alwyn to cast a spell on me, making me temporarily deaf."

Matt laughed as he rejoined his wife, having sent their screaming children to play out in the courtyard, where their noise would at least be muffled. "If there are any spells cast around here, it should be one to silence the kids' vocal chords. That way we'd all get a break."

G'Tan gave a rumble of laughter from where he sat next to No'Kar at the large dining table. The two Narn had stayed on after the wedding, taking advantage of the time the Excalibur remained in orbit over Eriadne to take a few days shore leave. The Marine Sergeant chuckled as he said, "I find their noise quite refreshing. Without it, I think we would miss the pouchlings more."

Demon leaned forward and patted G'Tan's arm, grinning as she said, "Why don't you ask John if he could call for a shuttle to bring the children down here? There's plenty of room for them to stay with you here at the castle." There was a twinkle in Demon's eye as she made her suggestion, and Angel knew her big sister was teasing the Narn Marine.

G'Tan was actually enjoying the break from his own family, which was made quickly apparent when he said hurriedly, "No, no, that's quite unnecessary. We'll cope without them. But I do have a suggestion which could give the rest of you a break. Why don't you go out for the day, up into the hills, while No'Kar and I stay here with the children?"

Angel listened intently to the debate that followed. She rather liked the idea of being able to show Jack more of the planet, but recognized the dangers of G'Tan's suggestion, as the countryside outside the area cleared by the Vorlons was inhabited by a multitude of predatory species.

Alwyn cut across all the arguments with a proposal that satisfied everyone. He would take his ship up to the designated area, clearing it of life-forms, and maintaining a force field to protect the party. After this suggestion, a plan quickly emerged, which Matt summarized.

"Sarah and Alwyn will go ahead on their ship, clearing an area for us, while the rest of us follow on fly-bikes. G'Tan and No'Kar will stay behind with the kids. Is that the plan?"

Angel wasn't surprised to see her oldest sister shaking her head vehemently. "Uh uh. The rest of you can go on fly-bikes if you like, but I'll go with Sarah and Alwyn. You won't get me on one of those things again."

Matt laughed and lifted Demon's hand to his mouth, kissing it gently, and whispering something in her ear that made the tall blonde flush. She smiled and whispered something back, intriguing Angel when she caught the word 'sock'. Now why would Demon mentioning that word make Matt laugh and blush at the same time?

It was quickly decided that Sarah would ride with Matt, while John and Lily rode together, and Max, Ilas, Luke, Dureena, Angel and Jack would all pair off to ride the remaining bikes.

They had all been surprised to discover the small fleet of fly-bikes that had been left behind several years before, when Lucas Buck had departed from Eriadne. He had brought the bikes with him for use by his men in controlling the population during his brief occupation of the planet, and had abandoned them when he left. The Brakiri had used them occasionally in the intervening years, and had kept them well serviced. As they used Minbari power cells as their fuel source, the bikes still had years of use left in them.

Angel looked across at Harry, who sat nursing Baby on his knee. The little dog was looking sorry for himself, as after the wedding he had gotten into the kitchens and found a large bowl of leftovers, on which he had proceeded to gorge himself. The puppy had then made his way up to Jack and Angel's living room, and been sick on the carpet. Jack and Angel had been disturbed by the odd noises and had emerged from their bedroom to find Baby looking very contrite as he curled up on his bed in the corner, trying to pretend that the obnoxious pile in the center of the floor had nothing to do with him.

Having cleared up the mess, Angel had gone back to bed, while Jack had called for Harry to come and collect Baby. When they had come down that morning, they had found Harry finishing breakfast with a very forlorn looking Baby at his side. The little dog had wagged his tail and staggered across to greet Angel and Jack, but was obviously still suffering the after-effects of his over-indulgence. After a few half-hearted licks and wuffs, Baby had retreated to the comfort of Harry's care.

Angel now looked at the man and dog, and smiled. "Do you want to come with us, Harry? I'm sure Alwyn would take you and Baby on his ship if you want to come."

The Technomage nodded kindly, but Harry shook his head. "No thanks, Miss Angel. Me and Baby will stay here. We like it here, and Baby's still not feeling too good." He patted the little dog's head and was rewarded by a gentle swipe of Baby's rough tongue.

Lily then asked, "But where shall we go? If we're going out on the bikes, it should be somewhere we can't get to quickly on foot."

After a few moments spent debating, Angel had an idea. "I know. Let's go up to the Carillon Gap. The view up there is spectacular." Seeing the doubtful look on her older sister's face, Angel grinned as she went on, "We can set up the picnic well back from the edge for those of us who don't like heights, but the rest of us can explore, if Alwyn is sure he can keep the wildlife away."

Alwyn assured them he could provide the necessary protection, and very quickly thereafter the party split up to make preparations for their picnic and day out, agreeing to meet back in the courtyard in an hour.

Angel and Jack left the dining room, hand in hand. Having nothing to do but change into

clothing suitable for their day out, Angel was sure they could make time for a little more lovemaking before they left. Looking up at her husband, the raven haired witch saw the twinkle in his eyes and realized that the same thought had occurred to him. They ran up the stairs together, intent on getting back to their rooms as quickly as possible.



Demon sat back in the armchair in the Technomage ship's control room and smiled at the man she sometimes thought of as her surrogate father. It had been over eleven years since she had first met Alwyn, and although their relationship hadn't got off to the most auspicious start--a combination of Demon's deep suspicion of Technomages, and Alwyn's interrupting her and Matthew at a very inconvenient moment--they had grown close over the intervening years.

Alwyn's help and support at the time when Marcus was born had brought the two closer, and his continued presence in their lives both during Demon's time living on the Excalibur and afterwards on Earth had cemented the bond between the unlikely pair. In reality, the only thing the two of them had in common was their strong English accents, but this had never handicapped their relationship, or their fondness for each other.

Smiling to herself now, Demon thought that sometimes Matthew even seemed a little jealous of her relationship with the Mage, but then again, he was a little jealous about any relationship Demon formed with another man. To be fair to her husband, he never let it affect his behavior, and if Demon hadn't been an empath, she might never have suspected that Matthew could be a jealous man. But with her empathic powers, Demon could sometimes detect that little surge of emotion that ran through Matthew when he watched her interacting with other men. Particularly Jack Gideon, Matthew's doppelganger, who often seemed to bring out the worst in Demon's husband.

"Penny for your thoughts," Alwyn said, rousing Demon from her introspection.

She chuckled, "No deal. They're worth much more than that." Demon grinned and went on, "But at the very least I should thank you for the lift up to the Carillon Gap, as there's no way I would have ridden up there on one of those death traps they call fly-bikes." The tall blonde shuddered at the thought of the journey the others were making as they followed Alwyn's ship up into the hills. "Do you know those things have no seat belts? Matthew tried to convince me that they're safe, but I'm not buying it!"

Alwyn laughed at Demon's vehemence. "I believe they have an excellent safety record when ridden correctly. Perhaps it's your husband's riding technique that leaves something to be desired." The Mage's wink made his innuendo clear, and Demon chuckled again.

"There's nothing wrong with Matthew's technique, whether riding or being ridden." Demon winked back and the Technomage laughed again.

After a short pause, Demon changed the subject. "I'm a little surprised that Vya didn't decide to join us, rather than staying with the children. He's really much more mature than the rest, physically and mentally, even though he's a few months younger than Marcus and the twins."

Alwyn raised an eyebrow. "Are you really surprised? Vya is more like a teenager than a full adult as yet. What was Ilas like when she was his age?"

Demon laughed. "Actually, you're right. When Ilas was at the same stage of maturity, she could swing from adult to child, onto stropky adolescent and back to adult again, within a single sentence. I'm just hoping that when Mattie hits that age, she'll be a little easier to handle than she is at the moment."

The tall blonde shook her head as Alwyn looked at her quizzically. "If she goes on the way she is now, she's going to be the most obnoxious teenager ever known to man. Even now Matthew sometimes insists that I must have spent the night with some sort of demonic being, as that's the only way to explain how we've ended up raising the spawn of Satan. I tell him to check her ears and he'll see that there's no doubt about who her father is."

Alwyn bellowed with laughter, then smiled gently at the tall blonde as he asked, "Is she so different to how you were at her age?"

Demon's smile faded, and she felt a lump rise into her throat, threatening to choke her. She swallowed it quickly, forcing her words out through lips frozen into a mask that covered her anguish. "By the time I was Mattie's age, my father had left me and my mother. I may have been noisy and boisterous before then, I don't really remember, but once he was gone..." Demon ran out of words, unable even now to talk about the pain of that time with anyone but her husband. She swallowed and forced a smile to her face. "No matter how obnoxious Mattie is when she gets older, I wouldn't want her to go through that."

The Mage leaned forward in his chair, his face creased with concern. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to open old wounds."

The tall blonde forced a smile to her face. "Ancient history. But one thing that's more recent puzzles me. What were you and Angel talking about when you first arrived? This is the first chance I've had to get you on your own to ask you about it."

Alwyn gave one of his mysterious smiles but said nothing. Demon sighed, knowing she wasn't going to be able to satisfy her curiosity, so she turned her attention back to her previous subject.

"Anyway, I guess for all his physical maturity, Vya is still as much child as adult, and he's probably enjoying being able to indulge in more childish activities for once. Once he joins the Rangers, he won't have time for games any more. I remember Marcus Cole describing some of the training Rangers have to go through, and it's not exactly easy."

Memories of her son's namesake made Demon sigh. Although he'd disappeared over a year before, she hadn't entirely given up hope that one day the Ranger would be found. Demon knew that Marcus' wife, Susan Ivanova, refused to entertain any possibility that he was still alive,

and she mourned for his loss, although she hid her feelings from the world and maintained a cold, emotionless façade.

Changing the subject again, Demon said, "Shouldn't we be there by now? I guess the others will expect us to have everything unloaded by the time they arrive."

"Already taken care of." Alwyn waved his hand and a holographic window opened in the air in front of them. Through the window, Demon could see a view of the area outside the ship. She hadn't felt them land, but the ship was settled in a broad, sunlit meadow. Outside, an area of the soft, pale green moss that covered the ground had been laid out with a large, white cloth, surrounded by piles of cushions and blankets. The cloth was covered with plates, cutlery, tins, packages and boxes of varied sizes and shapes, with glasses and bottles gleaming in the sunshine.

Demon's eyes widened in surprise. Somehow Alwyn had moved all the items they'd stowed in the hold of his ship, laying them out for their picnic, without ever moving from his seat, or showing any sign of preoccupation. She shook her head and laughed, "I'm impressed! Either Ishtar has been very busy or a Technomage is a very handy person to have around when you need things moved. If Matthew and I ever move house again, can we call on your services?"

Alwyn threw a cushion and Demon ducked as she gave him a cheeky grin, then rose from her seat. "I assume the area has been cleared of wildlife?"

The Technomage nodded as he, too, rose from his seat. "Yes, and the ship's ramp is facing away from the edge of the precipice, so you needn't worry."

Demon gave the Mage a grateful smile and followed him out of the ship

"Slow down, Angelique. It's not a race!" Jack bellowed into his wife's ear, but he knew he might as well have saved his breath. He tightened his grip around her waist, pressed his knees so hard into the side of the bike he was sure he would leave dents, closed his eyes and prayed.

He couldn't say he hadn't been warned. When they'd gathered in the courtyard after watching Alwyn's ship rise into the sky, Matt had spoken softly to Jack. "It may not be such a good idea to let Angel drive."

Jack had shaken his head, half irritated at Matt's attempt to interfere. Matt had shrugged, saying, "OK, but remind me to tell you one day about how Angel drives a Ferrari. And never go back to California; her unpaid speeding tickets could bankrupt you."

Jack had ignored him, and proceeded to explain the controls of the fly-bike to Angelique, while the others had mounted their bikes and gone on ahead. After a couple of circuits of the courtyard, Angelique had decided she was ready to go. In hindsight, Jack knew he should have been alerted by the sparkle in her eye and the flush of her cheeks. He had married a speed freak. Angelique was an adrenaline junkie, and he wasn't sure he was going to survive the trip up into the hills.

If she didn't crash them, Jack thought he might just have heart failure. His heart had already leaped into his throat on at least three occasions, when Angelique had decided to take a closer

look at something that had caught her eye on the ground. She had put the fly-bike into a nose dive, braking so hard that Jack was convinced his tonsils were now stuck to the back of his teeth. Then when her curiosity was satisfied, Angelique had accelerated away hard and fast, leaving Jack's stomach plastered against his spine.

Jack had quite liked the arrangement of his internal organs before the trip started, so he hadn't really appreciated the makeover Angelique had given him during the ride. He'd learned, however, that repeated bellowing and screams of terror had absolutely no effect on his wife. Neither had more measured pleading, although Jack had noticed that she'd slowed down a little after he'd actually whimpered in fear. He didn't think he'd ever made a noise quite like that in his life before, but he was willing to try it again, if it would only make her reduce speed.

He opened his eyes long enough to see that they were now catching the other bikes ahead of them. Jack hoped that this might slow Angelique down a little. Maybe once she'd caught up with the others, she wouldn't feel the need to go quite so fast.

No such luck. Angelique passed the others with a merry wave and a happy scream of laughter. Jack could only hope that the others would think his own echoing scream arose from the same source, and not from the abject terror that actually drove the sound from his tortured throat.

After what seemed like an eternity, Jack felt the fly-bike slowing. He pried his reluctant eyes open again, and saw Alwyn's ship before them, with Demon and the Technomage standing nearby, waving them in to land near the area laid out for the picnic.

Angelique brought the fly-bike into a landing that was only a hair short of crash, rattling Jack's teeth and bones so hard that for a moment he wasn't sure he could move. He had a vision of himself trying to dismount the bike, and falling into a heap of broken shards on the ground.

His bride gave another merry laugh and leaped off the bike, running over to her sister, bouncing with excitement as she yelled, "That was amazing! Demon, how could you possibly not like fly-bikes? They're wonderful! I haven't had so much fun since..."

Angelique paused, turning to wink at Jack, who still sat on the fly-bike, waiting for the strength to come back into his legs. Just then, they felt like Jell-o. Angelique went on, "Well, since a few minutes before we left the castle." The look she gave Jack was filled with love and passion, and he tried hard to force an answering smile to his face. He feared it was more of a gritted grin of fear, but it was the best he could do.

While Angelique admired all the things laid ready for them, the other fly-bikes began to land around them, and Demon came across to help Jack. Her smile was both amused and concerned as she asked, "Are you OK? Didn't Matthew warn you about Angel's love of speed?"

Jack held onto the tall blonde's arm, grateful for the support as he dismounted. He finally found his voice enough to croak, "He tried. I thought he was joking."

The ex-Captain's knees wobbled as his sister-in-law led him to a pile of soft cushions and lowered him gently to the ground. Before she straightened up to leave him and join her husband, she smiled again and said softly, "If I were you, I'd ask Alwyn for a lift back to the castle, or insist on driving yourself."

Jack nodded vehemently, reaching for a bottle that rested conveniently within reach. If ever in his life he'd needed a drink, it was now.

{[Chapter 1](#)} {Chapter 2} {[Chapter 3](#)}

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Five A

{[Part 1: A Marriage of Inconvenience](#)}