

The Witches of Eriadne: Double, Double - Part 5: Departure

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Demon and Matthew

Chapter 3

Gideon opened his eyes slowly, looking around Medbay, wondering what had happened to him. His chest hurt like hell. It felt like he had broken ribs; how had that happened? He raised a hand in front of his face and saw that it was bandaged; he had no recollection of hurting his hands. He tried to remember what had happened to him.

He remembered being down on the planet. He remembered Angel and Deborah. He smiled at those memories. Well, the Box had certainly called that one right. Pain and pleasure. The Box; what was it about the Box that disturbed him? Just thinking about it made him feel uncomfortable. He pushed those thoughts aside and continued to reassemble his memories.

He followed his thoughts through his time with Deborah to their falling out. Stupid. If he'd just been a bit more controlled she wouldn't have reacted as she had. Then to Angel and his last moments with her in the cell. And the spell. That was the last thing he remembered, that and the pain. Then it was a blank. But it wasn't a complete blank. Vague images had continued to float in front of him. Which brought him sitting upright in the bed. Matheson! Something had happened to John, and he had a horrible feeling it was his fault.

His sudden movement had set off a series of alarms, and he realised that he was covered in monitoring equipment including... he lifted the blanket and looked underneath. Oh great, well that

was coming out as soon as he could get help in removing it!

Luke Raven appeared in the doorway of the room where Gideon lay. "Hey Doc, help me out here will you? Get this thing off me."

Luke grinned and moved over to help Gideon remove all the equipment they had hooked up to him. "How are you feeling, Captain? You've had a rough time." Luke checked Gideon's pulse and temperature. Back to normal.

"I feel like a herd of elephants has gone for a stroll over my chest, but otherwise fine. Just a bit tired. Oh, all right. I feel like I could sleep for a week. What the hell has been going on around here?"

"You're lucky to be alive. You have a cracked rib which is nearly healed and your hands are burnt, but also healing nicely." Raven started to undo the bandages on Gideon's hands and looked carefully at the new pink skin underneath. "You're lucky, Captain. If it weren't for the equipment we brought back from the planet, your hands would have been weeks healing. As it is, in 36 hours they're almost as good as new."

Gideon felt confused. "How did I burn my hands?" He looked at his palms. The skin was tight and tender. Not painful but stretched. He looked up at Raven, who was watching him carefully.

"Do you remember anything at all after Angel cast her spell?" Gideon stared at Raven in total disbelief. How the hell did he know about that? And Raven talking about spells? This was weird, but he decided to play along.

"I don't know about a 'spell' but the last thing I remember was her muttering a lot of strange words and getting this incredible pain. Then, well, I guess I must have blacked out. I don't remember anything else until I woke a couple of minutes ago. Except..." He paused and looked down at his hands again.

"Except?" Raven prompted him

"Well, I seem to have had some pretty weird dreams." Gideon looked embarrassed. There was no way he was telling Raven about the dreams he'd had about Deborah and Angel. But the dream about John Matheson worried him.

"Tell me Doctor, is Lieutenant Matheson OK?" Gideon leant back against the pillows and watched Raven carefully. As a doctor he was pretty good at keeping his thoughts from showing on his face, but Gideon had sat across a poker table from experts and he could see that Raven had a problem. "Tell me."

"John has been badly injured. He's still hanging on, but I'm not sure whether he's going to make it. It could go either way." Raven's voice was tight with emotion. Gideon was surprised, he hadn't realised that the doctor and Matheson were friends.

"What happened?" Gideon was feeling increasingly uncomfortable. He felt as if he were responsible in some way.

"It's a long story, but you need to know it. This is going to take some time, so just relax and listen. We're going to be here a while." Raven started from the point at which Demon had gone to Gideon's cell.

Lily stood in the door connecting the main Medbay chamber to the room where John Matheson was lying, staring at his unmoving form. She looked even paler than usual, almost sick, and unshed tears were shining in her eyes.

Luke had told her that he'd done everything he could, that John was still in a critical state, and that his fate would be decided in the next few hours. He'd asked her with a haunted look in his eyes, "You knew this would happen, didn't you? That's why you made us promise..." His voice had faltered, and he'd quickly lowered his eyes. Her simple "Yes," had hit Luke worse than any elaborate explanation. He'd drawn her into a tight, warm embrace, as much for her comfort as for his, then murmured something about having to tend to Gideon and almost ran off.

Lily knew he hadn't wanted her to see his desperation, but she'd known anyway. She leaned her head against the doorframe, trying to fight the fear threatening to overwhelm her. Finally, Lily braced herself and slowly walked up to the bed. For her it had always been worse not to know, than to know the terrible facts, so she decided she would stay here until John's state had improved, or... [Or until he lost the fight.] She ignored the chair, and standing there took his hand in hers, smoothing back his hair with her free hand.

"Oh John..." she whispered, feeling the first tears run down her face. "Don't leave me, John, you promised to fight! Do you hear me? Don't forget! Remember the promise you made! Don't leave us, Sweet Face!" Her voice had become raw from her tears. She softly kissed his lips, then snuggled up against him on the bed, not caring that her tears wet the sheets and whatever he was wearing. Although she knew she could only send to her sisters, a foolish hope made her try to get through to him. [Please John ... fight! I need you... We need you! Come back to us!]

Her sisters felt her efforts, and however preoccupied they were, however hopeless the task seemed to them, they tried to add their strength to her sendings. She allowed herself only a short moment of distraction to send them a wave of gratitude, and then concentrated fully on the task of helping John come back.

Gideon lay back against the pillows of his bed trying to take in everything the doctor had told him. He opened his eyes and sat upright. "Now let me get this straight. Angel put a spell on me. I was possessed by an evil spirit. While I was possessed I raped three women, shot Matheson and tried to take over the ship. Galen and the women got rid of the evil spirit and now I'm back to normal. Is that what you're telling me?"

Luke winced as he saw the sceptical expression on Gideon's face. "Well, when you put it like that it does sound a bit crazy, but essentially, yes. Except..." Luke paused and tried to find the right words "I'm not sure that rape is the right term. Just overly aggressive?" Not what he'd meant at

all, definitely the wrong words. He opened his mouth to try again. Gideon stopped him with a gesture.

"Let's not get too technical here. You're telling me I hurt them and tried to kill my first officer." Luke leapt to his feet and paced the room.

"NO! You didn't do any of those things. You weren't there! He'd taken over control of your body." He was becoming more convinced every moment that Gideon would have him sent to a lunatic asylum. He sounded crazy even to himself! Before Gideon could say anything more he continued.

"But the important thing is that it's over. You're back in your own body and we're back in orbit above the planet. Galen, Max and Dureena have gone down with Ilas and Angel to continue investigating the castle and the equipment we found there. Captain, this stuff could make a real difference." Luke tried hard to distract Gideon into a more positive line of thinking. But he could tell that it wasn't working. Gideon was brooding, ignoring him now, turned inwards on himself. He looked up as Raven ground to a halt.

"But it's not over, is it Doctor? Matheson is dying." Luke wished he could counter that, but knew he couldn't. He tried again.

"There's someone waiting to see you."

Gideon shook his head. "Not in the mood. Tell them to come back later."

A voice came from the doorway. "I've already waited a long time." Gideon looked up to see Demon standing there. Raven left quickly.

She must have fallen asleep ... but she wasn't at home. Lily felt disoriented for a few seconds, but found herself unable to open her eyes.

"Lily?" a voice whispered - a voice she knew, a weak voice... Suddenly everything that had happened over the last few days rushed in on her, and she sat up with a start, her eyes wide open, remembering where she must be. John's eyes were open, but still a little unfocused when he looked up at her. His breathing seemed a bit labored, but the monitors showed a steady heartbeat.

"John! You -" Lily hugged him as fiercely as possible and as softly as necessary. This time tears of joy ran down her cheeks. "You won! You fought and you won!" Her heart seemed to overflow with joy. John softly stroked her red curls.

"I think ... I had some help..." he whispered.

Lily pushed herself up on her elbows and looked at him, her eyes wide. "Help?"

He smiled. "I was floating for a long time, sometimes towards a light... sometimes away from it. And then ... it was strange ... a touch ... almost like a telepath who barely came through..." He gazed at her, his eyes more focused now. "It felt like... you, somehow. And it reminded me of the

promise I'd given you..." His fingers were wiping away the tears on her face.

Lily smiled. "I tried to get through ... and my sisters linked to help me. Oh John, it worked! I got through to you!" She bent down for a long, deep kiss. John's arms closed around her; she could feel him gain strength by the second. His hands roamed through her hair, over her back, holding her tightly, caressing her ... Lily broke the kiss, looking at him with her incredibly green eyes. She started to grin, then whispered, "I was afraid I'd lose you, and Luke, too ... I should really go tell him, he's..." She didn't struggle against him when John prevented her from saying more by pulling her down and covering her mouth with his lips.

Gideon closed his eyes and leaned back again. Demon could see that his chest hurt and he really wanted to be alone for a while. Her voice trembled slightly. "I just came to apologize. If you don't want to see me, I understand. I'll leave now."

He opened his eyes in time to see her turning to leave. "Wait, don't go yet. I don't understand; what are you apologizing for?" Demon had stopped in the doorway, but her back was still turned to him. She could feel him watching her as she straightened her shoulders, pulling herself together, and turned.

"This is all my fault. If I'd trusted you, if I hadn't over-reacted when Dureena escaped, none of this would have happened. I'm sorry, Matthew." She started to turn away again.

"Will you stop doing that? Don't you know I'm Captain on this ship and no-one leaves until I dismiss them?" He was smiling at her and held out his hand towards her. She could feel his concern and surprise. But mostly she could feel his guilt. It was almost overwhelming him and he was fighting it at every moment. She walked to the bedside and took his hand. He lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it gently.

"I don't really understand what's been going on here. I do know that no one is entirely to blame, but that maybe we all played a part. Yes, if you hadn't overreacted and taken me back to that cell, Angel couldn't have done what she did. Whatever that was. But then Angel played her own part in this and has to take responsibility for that. As I do. If I hadn't carried that damn Box around with me for years, none of this would have happened. But one thing I am sure of; we've all paid a price for our mistakes. What concerns me now is that John Matheson is going to pay the highest price and he did nothing to deserve it."

Demon could feel the pain behind his last words and reached up with her free hand to stroke his face. She didn't try to suppress his pain; she knew he wouldn't want that. But she did project her sorrow and compassion. He looked up at her and gently pulled her towards him. She could see him wondering if she would resist after what had happened.

She responded immediately, leaning forward and gently kissing his lips. He pulled her closer until she was sitting on the edge of the bed, leaning across him, with his arm around her shoulder. He deepened the kiss and she opened her mouth under his.

She looked up at him as he pulled his head back slightly and looked down at her, saying, "Maybe

we both need to learn to trust a bit more. But you have your sisters to protect and I have my crew. I don't think trusting comes easily to either of us." He pulled her closer again, and kissed her.

Suddenly Demon was overwhelmed by her sister's sending and went rigid in Gideon's arms. "Matthew! He's awake! He's going to be all right!" She sensed that he could see how excited she was but couldn't understand what she was talking about. He just looked at her quizzically. "Matheson is alive and awake. Lily is with him and she's getting very excited because he just woke up." She paused, *[[Lily slow down, please darling, we can't understand you!]]* and then smiled a radiant smile. "He's going to be fine, honestly Matthew, he'll be fine." *[[Lily are you sure that's wise? I mean he's still very weak ... well, I guess you know best...]]* "Lily is with him and she's going to stay there until he's better." She leant back into Gideon's arms and looked up to see that his eyes had filled with unshed tears. She kissed the side of his neck gently and found herself being hugged hard, and then his mouth claimed hers in a long and passionate kiss.

He lifted his head and whispered. "Thank you, Deborah."

Demon leant her head against his shoulder trying not to let him see how much it meant to hear him call her that. She'd thought that she would never hear that name again. Her finger traced the new skin on his chest, where his injury had healed. His chest was bare. The hair had been burned away and hadn't had chance to grow back with the new skin. She laughed softly, then spoke.

"I know I said I'd never liked hairy chests, but you didn't have to go to all this trouble." He grabbed her hand and brought it to his mouth, where he bit gently on the finger that had stroked his chest. She was laughing as he pulled her finger out of his mouth and kissed the tip.

"Want me to keep it this way? Hell, I don't even know if it'll grow back. If it does maybe you should shave it for me? Or is waxing better? Although I've been told that can hurt and frankly I'm sore enough. So could you live with it hairy again?" She leaned forward and gently kissed the new skin. Her lips moved slowly over his chest until she found his nipple, which she licked gently, then sucked. She could hear his breathing rate increase.

"Matthew, I'm so glad you're back that I don't care what your chest looks like. But let me help with the pain." She closed her eyes and continued to run her tongue and lips over his chest. And it did ease the pain.

Raven stood in the doorway to the Medbay room where Gideon had been for the last 36 hours. He smiled as he saw that Gideon and Demon both seemed to have fallen asleep. He raised an eyebrow when he noticed that Gideon had undone the zipper of the one piece ship suit they'd found for Demon that morning, and that his hand was slipped inside, cupping her breast. Raven thought back to the events of the past 36 hours.

The first night had been frantic. Matheson's life was hanging by a thread, and Gideon wasn't in much better condition. Raven had rushed from one to the other, anxiously watched by three of the four sisters. Ilas had left to join Max in his quarters.

When he had them both stabilized he'd finally noticed the state Angel was in, the bruises, bites

and general exhaustion. He'd pushed her straight into a bed and with Demon's help treated her injuries. But he knew that her pain was more mental than physical and he wondered whether anyone could ever heal the scars left by her time with Lucas. Demon had stayed with her sister the whole night and next day. They hadn't spoken much, but Demon's presence seemed to comfort Angel. But when Angel slept, Demon would leave her briefly to stand in the doorway to Gideon's room, watching him silently. She always seemed to know when Angel stirred and immediately returned.

Lily had not left Matheson's side since she'd arrived in Medbay.

Early that morning Max, Ilas, Dureena and Galen had come to Medbay. Galen had told them he was going to destroy the Box, but both Angel and Demon protested. He'd relented, but subject to them taking the Box down to the planet, where Demon would always be able to tell if Lucas tried to take someone over again. Angel had left with the others to take the Box back to the planet. Demon and Lily stayed behind; Lily snuggled against John's side while Demon sat by Gideon's bed, just watching. As far as Raven knew, Demon hadn't slept since entering Medbay.

She'd come to him soon after the others had left to ask if there was somewhere she could freshen up and get some clean clothes. She was soon back at Gideon's side. When he started to wake she'd come to Raven to tell him, then hung back out of sight of the doorway to Gideon's room.

Gideon's eyes opened and he spoke softly so as not to disturb Demon. "Problem, Doctor?"

Raven smiled back at him. "No problem, just time for a check up. I want to see how you're getting on." Raven approached the bed quietly and used one of the new pieces of equipment to run over Gideon's body. Heart, pulse, blood pressure all normal. Still a high level of toxins from exhaustion but otherwise fine. As he moved his hand away the instrument swept across Demon as she lay asleep in Gideon's arms. A light flickered which he hadn't seen before. What did that mean? He made a mental note to ask her and promptly forgot about it. He returned to his patient.

"When can I get out of here?" Gideon didn't seem sure whether he wanted out or not.

Raven looked dubious. "You could leave here now. But you're not fit for duty. That will take another couple of days at least."

Demon stirred in Gideon's arms and he looked down at her lying there. Raven could see that Gideon felt something for Demon. He just wondered whether it was as strong as Demon's feelings for him. Gideon looked back up at the doctor. "Why? I know I feel tired, but aside from a little pain in the chest I'm fine."

Raven explained. "While Lucas was running your body, he ran it hard. As far as I can tell, he hardly slept the whole time he was in control and he was physically very... active. You have a build-up of toxins and adrenalin after effects in your system that'll take at least another 48 hours to disperse." Raven looked down at Gideon and smiled wryly. "My concern is that if I try to keep you here, or confine you to quarters, you'll just ignore me and go back on duty anyway."

Gideon grinned at him. "Not fair. Only Sarah is supposed to know me that well."

Demon's voice emerged muffled from his chest. "And just who is Sarah?" She sat up and looked straight into Gideon's eyes.

"Trust you to wake up at the most inconvenient moment." Gideon reached out to stroke her hair. "Sarah Chambers, my usual ship's doctor. Dr. Raven here is standing in while she's on leave." He glanced down and realised that since he'd undone the zipper on the front of her suit, she was showing rather more of herself than he felt Raven was entitled to see. He leaned forward and pulled the zipper up, grinning at her. "Stop flaunting yourself, woman, I've seen it all before."

Demon slid off the bed and out of his reach. She went to stand by Raven's side and spoke to him, while looking directly at Gideon. "Well, Doctor, if he's going to be that much of a problem for you, I could always take him off your hands for a couple of days." She smiled as she continued. "Come and stay with us for a while Matthew. Your people have plenty to do down there and you didn't get to see much of our home on your last visit."

Gideon looked at Raven. "How about it, Doctor?"

"Perfect. In fact, I think I'll make it a medical order. Get out of that bed, Captain, I need it for someone who's really sick."

Lily had put her clothes in order and was now sitting on the edge of the bed, just in case someone should come to look in on John. He was looking at the ceiling, his hand absently caressing hers.

"What are you thinking about?" Lily asked. He knitted his eyebrows, then looked at her.

"Was it really Gideon who shot me?" The pain this caused him was evident in his voice and eyes. Lily realized he still didn't know anything that had happened; she'd been so happy he was alive that she'd completely forgotten to tell him. But before she could answer his question, Luke's voice said from the door. "It was his finger that pulled the trigger... but it wasn't him who wanted to kill you."

John and Lily turned around to see Luke come in, followed by Gideon, who was still a bit weak, but walked without assistance, and Demon. Luke beamed at the young lieutenant and patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't you ever do that to me again, you hear?" John nodded, a solemn smile on his lips.

"Thanks ... for keeping your promise," he murmured so only Luke and Lily could hear. Luke gave a short nod, then stood aside and motioned for Gideon and Demon to come nearer. John involuntarily flinched when he looked at his Captain. Gideon saw it, and was surprised at how much it hurt him.

Lily came over and led him to sit on the bed's edge where she'd been, ignoring his discomfort but giving him a sympathetic look, then sat down beside John's head and started to explain to him

what had happened, aided by Luke and Demon. When they were finished, John looked at Gideon, who'd been avoiding his eyes all the time, and still didn't dare to look at him. Finally he sat up with Lily's help and spoke.

"Matthew ... look at me!" Gideon was so surprised at the commanding tone in his XO's voice that he immediately did as he was told. He looked at him, unsure what to expect. "Listen to me well, Matthew. There was nothing you could have done. This isn't your fault. Someone took over your body, and it was that other person who shot me, and did all the other horrible things, not you! And if you don't stop berating yourself for that, I'll see to it that you get twice as many senseless reports to read through as you already do!"

That brought a smile to Gideon's face, albeit a small one, but a smile nonetheless. John smiled back at him, and the two men embraced. Lily looked up at Luke and Demon, tears in her eyes and a smile on her face.

Demon and Gideon went straight to her rooms in the castle. As soon as the door closed behind them, they were in each other's arms and kissing passionately. Gideon dropped the small bag he was carrying and wrapped his arms around her. His hand went straight to the zipper of her ship suit and pulled it down slowly until he could push the sides of the suit apart, exposing her breasts.

His head dropped and he took her nipple between his lips, suckling and licking, biting softly, as the pace of her breathing increased. She stretched her neck back and moaned her pleasure at what his mouth was doing, all the while conscious of the fact that his hands were working the suit down over her hips until it dropped to the floor. In seconds she was naked before him. He straightened and pushed her out at arms length, drinking in the sight of her. She moved her hands up under his sweater and pushed it upwards. He helped her take it over his head. She lowered her head to his chest and licked the new skin there, working her mouth downwards as her hands loosened his belt, unzipped his pants and pushed them down over his hips. Before he knew what was happening she was kneeling between his legs, taking his now swollen cock gently into her mouth. She stroked up the length of his shaft with her fingers while licking slowly, working her tongue around the head, then gradually took him further inside her.

His hands were in her hair, alternatively clenching and pulling her head towards him, trying to get more of himself inside her mouth. It was his turn to groan with pleasure. Her fingers were gently massaging his balls, making them feel as if they were on fire. He felt his cock stiffen and swell further as she continued to lick and stroke her way up and down his shaft.

When she sensed that he was on the brink of coming she pulled her mouth back and gently kissed the very tip of his cock before looking up at him. He moved his arms under her shoulders and hauled her to her feet. Locking his mouth over hers he pushed her until her back was against the wall.

One of his hands stroked down her side, over her hip and around her buttock. The other cupped her breast and his thumb massaged her hard nipple. He moved his hand on around her thigh until he pushed between her legs; they parted before his pressure.

Still kissing her deeply, his tongue dancing with hers, he pressed his hand upwards, and entered her. She was hot and wet. Her hips were thrusting against his, pressing into his erection. He pulled his hand out of her and hooked it under her leg, then lifted until he could bring it around his back. He bent his knees slightly, positioning himself carefully at her opening, now running with her juices, then thrust up into her, pushing her back against the wall.

She threw her head back and half screamed as he entered her and for a moment he thought he'd hurt her, but looking into her face he could see that she was deep in the pleasure of having him inside her. She was writhing her hips in a figure of eight motion that kept changing the pressure of her walls on his cock, while he pushed himself further and deeper into her. Every part of his shaft was being stimulated and he knew he couldn't last much longer.

He moved the hand that had been on her buttock, pulling her into him with every thrust. He slid it over the thigh that was wrapped around him and found her clitoris. He was pounding into her harder with every stroke, and she was panting with exertion and pleasure. When his finger found her clit, she exploded into orgasm. Every time he thrust into her she lifted again, cresting at a new height of pleasure when he finally came, releasing a stream of hot fluid inside her.

Again, he didn't know for sure whether it was her climax or his that he felt more strongly. She was sending her pleasure so loudly that he was sure half the castle must have been coming right along with them.

Gideon leaned against her, breathing hard as he felt her bring her leg down to steady herself. He was still buried inside her and the sensation, as her leg shifted, was overwhelming. He felt that he could spend the rest of his life right here. He couldn't think of a better place to be than to have as much of him as he could possibly get deep inside her.

She was kissing his neck and shoulder as they stood locked together. Finally, he straightened and moved his hands to cup her face. "If the doctor knew what you were going to do with me, I doubt he'd have sent me here for a rest!" She smiled at him, still enjoying the feel of him inside her.

"Well, if it's rest you need, maybe we'd better lie down next time."

Angel sat on the loveseat in her bedroom, staring at her bed. The silk scarves that Lucas had used to tie her still hung from the head and foot of the bed. She thought about that night and felt herself become hot and wet inside at the memories. She lay back on the seat and closed her eyes, longing to have him back, touching her, kissing her, caressing her, fucking her. She knew he'd been rough with her, but although he'd hurt her at times, she'd enjoyed every moment of sex with him. She missed him.

Everyone kept telling her that he was evil, but she struggled to see why. He'd been rough with her, with Demon and most of all with Lily, but he hadn't done any of them any real harm. The only really bad thing he'd done was to shoot Matheson, but even that was sort of self-defense in her view. Matheson would have warned the ship and they would have stopped him. Why did they all say he was evil?

She remembered when Galen had told her they were going to destroy the Box. She'd screamed her protests, and been surprised when Demon backed her up, but was glad of her support. How could they consider killing him? Didn't he have the right to exist like anyone else? She'd insisted on leaving Medbay and returning to the planet with them to make sure they didn't harm him.

She felt the first of Demon's sendings and fell to the floor, crying out in pain. Demon had Gideon again, and he was giving her pleasure that seemed to increase every time they made love. Ilas was in her rooms with Max and Dureena. Lily had stayed on the ship with Raven and Matheson. Only Angel was alone. It wasn't fair. She wanted Lucas back.

Gideon woke early the next day and lay quietly for a moment. He was still tired but the pain in his chest had diminished. The previous afternoon and night with Deborah had been wonderful. He thought about how he was feeling and tried to find a word to describe it. Could it be ... happy? He couldn't remember what that felt like. He decided he was pushing his luck. [Let's just call it "content".]

He turned on his side and looked down at Deborah sleeping beside him. She was not a tidy sleeper. She sprawled across the bed, arms and legs spread wide. The covers had slipped off her (as they always did) and her breasts were bare to his view. He could never get enough of the sight of them, but somehow that always led to him touching them. He resisted; he didn't want to wake her yet, he was enjoying watching her sleep. He thought she was beautiful when awake, but when asleep, her face relaxed and lips slightly parted, she was stunning. He felt his cock stirring as he looked at her asleep and half naked. His resistance broke and he reached across the stroke her breast, while leaning forward to kiss her. His now fully erect penis pressed against her hip as he moved. Her mouth opened under his and he felt her nipple harden as he touched it. It amazed him how easily she was aroused. She seemed to want his body as much as he wanted hers. She rolled onto her side, pressing herself against him, bringing her arms up to his shoulders, her mouth still locked to his. His swollen cock was now pressed between them and the movements of her hips against him continued to stimulate him.

Pushing against his shoulders, she rolled him onto his back, laying herself along the full length of his body, her breasts crushed between them. She spread her legs and brought them up on either side of his legs until she straddled his hips. He could feel the heat of her opening against his thighs.

Still locked into a deep and passionate kiss, she shifted her hips until she was positioned above him, then reached down to guide him into her. He could feel the walls of her vagina pressed close around him, the muscles he'd stretched the night before tight again now. But she was wet inside and slowly, carefully she lowered herself onto him, gradually taking him deeper inside her. Her tightness and the pulsing of her muscles began to build him towards release. She increased the pace of her movements, rotating her hips in time with her downward thrusts, her muscles clenching when he was deepest inside her. She moved her head alongside his, allowing them both to breathe more deeply, matching the increasing rhythm of their strokes.

He was matching her thrust for thrust now. He wanted to reach down to stimulate her, but her

legs were locked so tightly round his hips and her body pressed so hard to his that he couldn't get his hand between them. Instead he reached down her back and grasped her buttocks, pushing her down onto him, harder and harder. He felt himself coming and tried to hold back, waiting for her to join him, but she was driving him too hard, and he couldn't control it any longer. He moaned as he came, releasing everything he had into her hot wet core. She slowed the pace of her movements, gradually coming to a halt, lying still on his chest. He reached up and stroked her hair, whispering "Sorry" into her ear. She lifted her head and smiled down at him.

"That one was just for you. My turn next." He rolled her over onto her back, still buried inside her. He looked down into her hazel eyes and kissed her gently.

"You'll be the death of me, Deborah."

Gideon and Deborah sat on the terrace outside her rooms eating breakfast in their robes. Their chairs were close together and he'd pulled her across onto his knee, where he was feeding her fruit with one hand, while the other rested in its usual place, holding and playing with her breast. She shifted her mouth and bit gently on his thumb, taking it deep into her mouth, sucking and licking at the juices running down his hand. He could feel himself becoming aroused as she wriggled in his lap. He began to wonder if there was a limit to how often he could get an erection in one day. A tone sounded from inside her rooms and she sat still for a moment listening.

"I'm sorry, I'd better get that." She stood up and returned to her room to answer the Comm. console there. He sat back with his eyes closed, enjoying the breeze on his face and the sunshine. It was a warm morning and looked like being a hot day. He wouldn't need the sweater he'd brought down with him; jeans and a t-shirt would be fine. He dozed as he waited for her to return.

Deborah emerged from her rooms fully dressed. Bending down, she kissed him gently. "I'm sorry Matthew, I'm needed in the village. Do you mind if I disappear for a couple of hours?" He looked up at her and smiled, taking her hand.

"I know you have responsibilities. Go do what you have to do, but hurry back." Standing, he pulled her towards him and kissed her, pushing her lips apart with his tongue, seeking hers and playing with her. He felt her arms reach around his neck, pulling herself even closer to him. She pulled her head back and spoke softly, her deep voice rough with desire.

"You can be sure of that," she said, and put her mouth back to his. Eventually, she took her arms from around him and placed them on his shoulders, gently pushing him away. "I have to go." He released her and pulled her hand to his mouth, kissing her palm as she pulled away from him. He watched her walk away, enjoying the view as her hips and buttocks swayed. As she disappeared he turned towards the courtyard, and saw Galen walking away. In a moment Deborah appeared and he watched her as she crossed and left the castle.

Angel stood safely hidden from view by the overhanging leafy branches of the large Koa tree, looking up at the terrace outside Demon's room. She watched as Demon and Gideon sat eating

breakfast, standing further back into the shadows, not wanting to be seen. Her heart felt like it was going to break when she saw Gideon pulling Demon onto his knee.

Watching Gideon with her sister hurt more than she imagined it would. She knew he was with Demon, and that Demon loved him, but she was still jealous. She knew he was Gideon, and that was part of the reason why she was still attracted to him, why she ... why she wanted him. But also because every time she saw him, he reminded her of Lucas. And that made her angry, because he wasn't Lucas.

Angel tried to shake those thoughts away but she wasn't having much success. Her thoughts were confused after everything that had happened. She missed Lucas. He'd gotten under her skin, and it felt like those feelings for him would never go away.

She continued watching Gideon with Demon, and found herself wishing desperately that it were she in his arms and not Demon. Angel sighed heavily. That would never happen. Gideon probably hated her. [Who can blame him after what I did?] Angel sighed again as she watched Demon going back inside.

Angel didn't see or hear Galen approaching her from behind. She visibly jumped at the sound of his voice behind her.

"Hello, Angel." He spoke quietly. He'd been watching her, watching Matthew and Demon, and he could tell by the expression on her face what she'd been thinking about. And he could tell that she was hurting.

Angel turned around in surprise. "Galen. You startled me," she said in a nervous voice, feeling guilty that she might have been caught watching.

Galen smiled. "Sorry about that. Matthew keeps threatening to tie a bell around my neck so that people can hear me coming." Angel laughed a little at his comment. Galen couldn't help how much he loved to hear her laugh, and to see her smile. On those rare occasions that she had done those things since they met, he'd become captivated by her. But from what he'd just seen, he had to admit to himself that nothing would ever happen between him and Angel. It was obvious that her feelings lay elsewhere.

Angel shifted slightly where she stood, wondering why Galen was looking at her the way he was. She had the feeling that there was something he wanted to talk to her about.

"Is there something you wanted Galen?" asked Angel, more for reason of breaking the silence than for actually wanting to know.

"Actually, there is something." Galen took her arm gently and led her to a bench where he indicated for her to take a seat. Angel hesitated for a moment and then sat down, looking at him quizzically when he joined her. There was a serious expression on his face.

"How are you feeling, Angel?" It was a simple enough question, but Angel knew that Galen was asking her more than that. He was silently asking her how she felt about Gideon and Demon, and Lucas. And she didn't want to talk about it.

"Oh I'm doing fine, Galen. Doctor Raven fixed me up as good as new," she said with forced cheerfulness as she skirted around the question. She could tell by the look and sigh he gave her that he knew she was avoiding his questions and that he wasn't going to let her get away with it.

Galen took her hand in his, and looked into her eyes. "You know that's not what I was asking, Angel," chided Galen gently. At his gentle tone, Angel had to fight back the threat of tears she had been feeling all the time since Demon and Gideon had arrived. When she spoke her voice was sad and tight.

"Please, Galen, I ... I don't want to talk about it."

Galen was quiet for a moment, when he spoke his voice was gentle and understanding. "I understand what you must be feeling, Angel ..." He was cut off by Angel suddenly pulling her hand free from his and standing up. Her expression was angry.

"You have no idea how I feel Galen! No idea." Despite her anger, her tone was low. She didn't want anyone to hear them. Galen looked up at her, as she looked down at him, anger in her eyes, and for a long moment he didn't say anything. Then he stood up, and placed his hands on her shoulders. He was mildly surprised that she didn't pull away. He had almost expected her to bolt. When Angel looked up at him, he saw no more anger, only pain.

"Angel, I know you have feelings for Matthew," He saw Angel opening her mouth to deny it and he let go of one of her shoulders so that he could place a finger gently over her soft lips, silencing her words. "Yes, you do, and that you're feeling some jealousy that he's with Demon." He could tell by the look in her eyes that he was right. Before he continued Galen steered her back to the seat.

Angel let Galen sit her down on the seat. She wanted to deny what he'd said, but she couldn't, all she could do was listen as he continued.

Galen's tone was gentle, "I know that you have been through a lot. And that although you want Matthew, you'll never again do anything to prevent him and Demon from being together, or anything that would hurt your sister." Galen paused, choosing his next words carefully. "I'm also aware that you miss Lucas, but you have to accept that he's gone, and that Matthew is not Lucas. You have to forget about him. He did nothing but cause pain and suffering, and he's where he belongs now." Galen stopped to watch Angel's face.

Angel had heard every word Galen had spoken. She kept a blank expression as she looked at him. She didn't want him to know that she was finding it near to impossible to forget Lucas, and that even worse, she'd been spending a lot of time thinking about the Apocalypse Box and how she felt drawn to it. When she spoke, she forced her voice to sound neutral.

"Don't worry, Galen, I know he's where he belongs and I'm glad that he's gone." Angel silently prayed that Galen didn't see that she was lying. She continued softly, "And as for Matthew, I don't feel anything for him. And I'm happy that he and my sister are together." Angel stood up, not giving Galen a chance to reply or say anything further.

Galen was about to say something but was silenced as Angel bent down to place a brief kiss on

his lips.

"Thank you for everything, Galen, and for understanding. Now if you don't mind, I have something I need to do." Galen watched in mild astonishment as Angel turned and quickly walked away.

Galen sat there unmoving as he watched Angel disappear through a large door on the other side of the courtyard. He raised a hand to his lips, where she had kissed him. He sighed as he replayed what she had said to him, paying more attention to what she hadn't said. She'd denied having any feelings for Matthew, but he'd seen the way she'd watched him with Demon on the terrace. And he also didn't believe her denial about Lucas. That worried him greatly, he had the feeling that although she was probably denying it to herself, she had actually fallen in love with that monster. Galen sighed again. He couldn't understand how she could love someone like that. Matthew, yes, but Lucas?

Galen stood up, watching where Angel had disappeared, suddenly realizing that he was feeling something other than concern for her. Galen shook his head and smiled slightly. He knew he didn't stand a chance, Angel could only think about Matthew, and Lucas. After a long moment of standing still Galen turned, his long coat flapping with his movements. He headed off in the opposite direction to that Angel had taken.

Returning to Deborah's rooms, Gideon dropped his robe and walked into the bathroom. He climbed into the shower and stood for a while enjoying the stream of hot water that cascaded over him. Washing his hair, he thought about how much more fun it would have been if Deborah had been there with him. His earlier erection had faded when she left him to answer the console. It returned as he thought of previous baths and showers with her. He looked down at it and grinned.

"Don't you ever get enough?" He knew the answer was a resounding 'No' where Deborah was concerned. Rinsing down he left the shower, dried himself, then toweled his hair roughly. Walking into Deborah's bedroom he stood in front of her mirror looking at himself.

The color of the new skin on his chest was fading and matching the rest of his skin. It looked strange to him without hair, but it didn't bother him. He looked at his body and wondered why Deborah seemed to like it so much. Long and lean, not heavily muscled but enough weight in the legs, arms, chest and shoulders to show that he was fit. He realised that he'd lost weight and vowed to eat better and work out more when he got back to the ship. He turned and pulled a pair of black jeans and a gray short sleeved T-shirt from his bag. Dressing quickly, he tugged on his uniform boots then left Deborah's rooms, ready to explore the castle.

Gideon spent the next hour wandering from room to room, following corridors and stairs, around, up and down, until he was thoroughly lost, but didn't care. He knew that eventually he'd come to a window overlooking the courtyard and get his bearings.

He was stunned by the complexity of the differing styles of decoration used throughout the castle, but was particularly impressed by the tapestries he came across. The clarity and detail were

amazing, and he gradually realised that the entire history of this place and its people was illustrated in them. He couldn't get the sequence straight, but decided he must speak to Max about deciphering them.

He followed the latest corridor to the end, where his path was blocked by two large heavily carved doors. Pushing them open he entered a library. He stood in the doorway, amazed by the size of the room lit by stained glass windows and chandeliers. Below the windows, bookshelves covered every wall on two levels, and every shelf was filled with books.

Gideon loved books. He loved the feel and the weight of them, the texture of the paper and the bindings. A data pad just wasn't the same for him. He started browsing the shelves, wondering how many Deborah would let him borrow. He wanted to fill a shuttle with them. They represented several centuries of Earth culture in a variety of languages, on every subject he could imagine. He wondered if Max had found this place yet. He suspected not or they'd never tear him away. He licked his lips and laughed at himself. He was lusting for these books with the same passion he felt for Deborah.

He heard a noise behind him and turned to see Angel standing in the open doorway, staring at him. She looked shocked and started to turn away.

"Stop. I want to talk to you," he barked at her. She froze and slowly turned back to face him.

"What about?" Her face was locked into an expressionless mask, which to him looked like a sneer of contempt. He felt his temper rising.

"Have you ever heard of the word 'Sorry'? I think you owe a number of people an apology, including me."

She strode towards him, coming to a halt inches away from him. He couldn't help but notice her perfume, how the tight red dress she wore was molded to her perfect body, her beautiful face with those clear blue eyes glaring up at him.

"Who the hell do you think you are to demand an apology from me? If I feel the need to apologize I'll do so, but it'll be when I want to. Don't ever try to dictate to me. You may be Captain on your ship, but down here you're nothing!"

He was struggling to control his anger and nearly spat the next words in her face. "You really are a bitch, you know. You don't care how much you hurt other people do you? Me, your sister, anyone who gets in your way, you just trample over them to get what you want."

Her hand came up to strike him, but this time his hands were free. He blocked her blow and caught her wrist, doing the same with her other arm as she swung again. He held her wrists high and hissed into her face. "Not so easy when your victim isn't tied down is it?" She was struggling wildly now, trying to kick and bite him, screaming at him to let her go. He pulled her tight against his chest, pushing her arms behind her, to protect himself from her blows.

He suddenly became aware that his cock was swollen and hard, and it was pressed between them as he held her tightly. She stopped struggling as she felt him pressing into her hip and threw her

head back to glare up at him.

He pushed his mouth down over hers, forcing her lips apart, invading her mouth with a brutality he didn't know he possessed. He released her arms and brought his hands round to the front of her dress and ripped it from neck to hem, exposing her naked body beneath. Her hands were pulling at his clothes, tearing them in her urgency to free his cock.

He grabbed her shoulders and lifted her, slamming her down onto the table behind her. He threw himself on top of her as she lifted and spread her legs for him. He barely paused to position himself before he thrust himself inside her. She screamed and he knew he'd hurt her, but couldn't stop. As he pressed deeper and deeper into her, she pushed her hips up to meet him thrust for thrust, with equal passion. Their coupling was violent and brief as they both exploded into orgasm at the same moment.

He lay on top of her, wondering what he'd done, when she lifted her arm and stroked his hair, whispering "Lucas" into his ear.

He straightened up, withdrawing from her abruptly. Trying to pull his torn clothes back together, he looked down at her as she lay on the table, her legs spread, his semen now trickling down her thigh. He was disgusted with himself and still angry with her.

"I'm not Lucas. Lucas is gone. And this will never happen again. You may hate your sister, but I don't." He turned and walked out of the library, leaving her spread naked across the table, hearing her sobs as he walked away.

Galen stood on the upper level of the library, looking down at Angel as she turned on her side, curled up and cried.

When Demon returned to her quarters she found Gideon sitting on her sofa, reading a book she'd left in her room. She immediately sensed a change since she left him. He'd been feeling relaxed and content when she'd left; now she could sense that he'd become more introspective, and his guilt had grown again. She wondered if he'd received bad news about Matheson's condition. That would explain why he was feeling guilty again.

He looked up from his book and smiled at her, "Everything OK?"

She sat on the sofa next to him and wondered if she should ask about Matheson. She decided to wait; he might tell her of his own accord. She didn't like to remind him of how she could read his feelings. "Fine, a domestic dispute between two householders, but the village elders couldn't tell who was telling the truth. They know I can always tell if someone is lying, so they wanted me to adjudicate. It just took a long time to get the different versions of events."

As she spoke she felt his anxiety level increase and wondered what she'd said. She decided to try to block herself from his feelings; it wasn't fair. "Did you stay here all the time?"

He shook his head. "No, I went exploring. This is an amazing place; I ended up in your library."

You have no idea how jealous that place makes me. It's an amazing collection."

"I know. The Vorlon must have been raiding Earth for centuries putting it together. If there are any books you want, let me know and I'll have them packed and ready for you to take with you on the shuttle. Did you see anything that interested you?" She was puzzled when he broke eye contact with her and dropped his head.

"I was interrupted. Angel arrived before I had chance to take a good look." Demon realised that this was the cause of his change in mood. She waited for him to continue. "We... fought. I lost my temper. I'm afraid we didn't part on very good terms."

Demon sighed. She'd hoped that Gideon and her sister could learn to get on. She'd feared that he wouldn't be able to forgive Angel for what she'd done and it seemed her fears had substance. "I'm sorry, Matthew. She isn't really bad, she's just a little thoughtless sometimes."

Gideon exploded out of his seat and began pacing the room. "Why are you apologizing for her? She won't apologize for herself. Just how much of her behavior are you willing to forgive, Deborah?"

"She's my sister. Not just one of my 'sisters', but related by blood. She's the only real family I have. I love her and if she has flaws, then perhaps I'm responsible for some of them. I more or less raised her from her mid-teens. I'll forgive her anything she truly regrets. I can't read my sisters in the same way I can others, but I can tell when Angel is really sorry. And I know how sorry she is for what she did to you. I'm just sad that she couldn't tell you that herself."

He stopped pacing, standing still in front of her. He reached down for her hands and pulled her to her feet. He kissed her and spoke softly. "She doesn't deserve you, Deborah. And neither do I." He kissed her again, long and slow.

She pulled her head back and grinned at him. "I don't want to be deserved. I just want to be fucked."

He raised an eyebrow and grinned back at her. "Now that I can do"

Lily couldn't help the tears running down her face. She had spent the last days in Medbay with John and Luke, who'd been with them every minute he could. John had recovered fast thanks to the Vorlon equipment, but Luke had said he still wanted to keep an eye on him. He'd kept him in Medbay, though he had to admit to himself that it wasn't really necessary. The real reason for keeping John here was that he wanted to have both John and Lily near him as long as possible. They'd talked about their lives, their dreams, everything but the inevitable impending separation. But now the moment they'd dreaded was here, and Lily's emotions overwhelmed her. She flung her arms around John, shaking from her sobs. He held her tightly.

[[I will never forget you.]] She heard his voice in her head. It was unexpected, and the emotions that came with it threatened to overwhelm her, but she didn't block him. The contact felt strangely comforting.

"And I won't forget you, Sweet Face. Not if I live a thousand years," she whispered. He cupped her face in his hands and looked at her, his eyes filling with tears, then drew her nearer for one last, deep kiss.

"It's time," Raven said, his voice tight with emotion.

John let go of Lily, trying to smile at her. "Come back if you can," she said as she stood, her voice raw. He nodded and squeezed her hand. Lily turned around abruptly and hurried out of Medbay, fighting back her tears.

Luke could see the muscles in John's cheeks work as he tried to get his emotions under control. He hesitated, then put his hand on John's shoulder and said, "I'll come here as soon as I get back ... if you want."

John looked at him and nodded, then lay down and turned his back to the doctor.

When he came out into the corridor, Luke found Lily standing with her back to him, leaning her forehead against the wall. He reached out to lay his arm around her, but she sensed his intention and evaded him. "Don't ... please." She looked at him with red-rimmed eyes, and he understood that the slightest sign of compassion would start her tears again.

"Let's go," he said.

When they entered the landing bay their shuttle was ready. Luke greeted the pilot with a short, "Hi, Trace," and the emotional strain showed in his voice. They spent the ride down to Eriadne B in silence. Lily had avoided touching Luke, still fighting for control, but just before they landed her hand crept into his and squeezed hard. He squeezed back, trying to give her a little of the comfort he needed himself. When they stepped out, Ilas, Max and Dureena were already waiting for them, and Galen arrived a few seconds later. The greetings they exchanged were muted, except for a moment when Lily and Ilas shared a quick, warm hug. Even if she hadn't been able to pick up Ilas's feelings through their bond, Lily would have known from the shade her skin had taken that her sister was in just as much pain as she was.

[[Sharing as sisters should!]] She thought at her sarcastically, and Ilas answered with a wry grin before she returned to Max's arms again. Dureena stood closely beside them, while Galen kept a respectful distance, not wanting to intrude on either group's privacy. They were all silent, watching Trace loading some crates into the shuttle with the help of two Brakiri.

When Lily saw Demon and Gideon approach, she felt as if her heart was torn in two, slowly, painfully, fiber by fiber. She was happy to see her sisters again, to have the hole inside her filled by their presence again, but having to leave John and Luke... She threw herself into Luke's arms. "I can't do this!" she whispered, burying her face in his chest.

She felt him stroke her red curls. "Yes, you can. You have your sisters who give you love and support. You know without them you wouldn't be happy." She lifted her face up to his, eyes

intense, and asked softly, "But who have you got to give you love and support... and who has John got?"

Luke understood her unspoken plea. "I'll have to leave the ship soon ... I'm only there as a temporary replacement while their doctor's on leave. But as long as I'm on the Excalibur, I'll be there for him. If he needs me, I always will be." She smiled, thankful, then leaned her head against his chest, savoring her last moments with him.

Finally Demon and Gideon arrived, holding hands. Lily could hear Ilas start to cry, and felt her own tears return. She hugged Luke tightly, felt his arms almost crush her. He kissed the top of her head, burying his hands in her curls, and their mouths met in a long, desperate kiss. Luke leaned his forehead on hers when they broke away for air.

"Even if I never see you again ... you will always be my Fire Lily," he said softly, his voice hoarse. Lily laughed, tears running down her cheeks. "Tell John... you... both... I..." Her voice failed. Luke gave her a sad smile. "We know." He took her hands and stole a last, soft kiss from her, then turned and walked up the ramp, not daring to look back.

Lily wrapped her arms around herself, staring at the shuttle's entry with eyes blinded by her tears. She could feel Ilas' arm wrap around her shoulder, and automatically did the same. They held each other, letting their tears flow freely.

The shuttle had landed some time before and Gideon saw that Galen, Max, Dureena and Ilas had already gathered by it as he and Deborah walked across the plain. Raven and Lily stood with them, holding each other tightly. Max had his arm around Ilas, whose skin seemed bluer than usual. Gideon wondered whether her skin reflected her mood. It was time to go, and it would be hard on all of them. He desperately wanted to stay, but knew he couldn't. He knew the others felt the same.

Deborah had been quiet since they woke that morning, but her lovemaking had achieved a new passion. He hadn't thought it possible that they could increase the level of pleasure they gave each other, but somehow they had done it, in her bed and again in her shower.

They'd breakfasted in silence, neither wanting to talk about his imminent departure. She left him briefly to check that the books he'd asked for had been packed and were ready for delivery. As she returned to the terrace they had both heard the first rumbles of the shuttle's engines as it descended.

They walked down to the shuttle together, holding hands tightly. Now they stood at the foot of the ramp. The others had gone aboard and Ilas and Lily stood to one side, crying quietly. Gideon turned to Deborah and pulled her into his arms, kissing her slowly, long and deep. As he released her mouth he whispered in her ear, "I'll come back as soon as I can."

He swung around and walked up the ramp into the shuttle leaving her standing below, exercising every ounce of control she possessed.

Ilas, Max and Dureena were awaiting the shuttle's landing at the usual place, Max's arm around Ilas' shoulder, Dureena standing close to them. They had spent each moment since they had come back down from the Excalibur in each other's company, intent on making the most of what little time they had. Before they had left the castle this morning, they had embraced, a wordless acknowledgement of the mixed emotions that filled them.

The shuttle landed, and when the ramp was lowered Lily and Raven came out, holding hands tightly. Galen arrived from the castle, and muted greetings were exchanged. Lily's sending when she drew her into a quick embrace almost made Ilas cry, but she managed a wry grin, then returned to Max's arms immediately, and Lily stepped into Luke's embrace.

When Demon and Gideon arrived, Ilas couldn't hold back her tears any longer. Max turned her around in his arms and kissed her one last time, then looked down at her with a lopsided grin, wiping her tears from her cheeks. "Hey -- most people would be glad to get rid of me."

Ilas tried a weak smile. "I'm not most people." Taking a step back, she wiped her tears on the back of her hand.

"No, you're definitely not," he replied. Max wanted to hold her again, but he feared that if he did, he wouldn't let her go. "Just don't forget me."

Ilas smiled, her face taking on a slight radiance. "No, I'll always have something to remember you by." Her hand drifted down from her face, caressing the side of her breast, and the flat of her stomach before falling to her side.

"Good," was all he could force himself to say. Not wanting to break down in front of anyone, he turned abruptly and nearly stormed up the ramp. He knew his actions could be misunderstood, but somehow he felt Ilas would know how he meant it.

Through the shuttle window, he watched Ilas and Dureena make their goodbyes. Ilas said something, and Dureena replied with apparently happy surprise. They hugged again, and Dureena boarded, sitting beside Max. They didn't speak, but each knew the other felt the same loss, and that was enough company.

Neither noticed when Raven walked up the ramp, eyes lowered, and took his seat.

Max dared to look out again, hoping for a last glimpse of Ilas. He noticed her hand was firmly on her stomach, as though protecting something ... Her words came back to him in a soft rush ... "I'll always have something to remember you by."

His shock and realization must have been clear, because Dureena elbowed him gently. She was grinning, Ilas had apparently told her more directly what Max had just figured out. When the other woman took his hand in a comforting gesture, Max didn't shake it away, instead returning her gentle squeeze.

Finally Gideon arrived, taking the seat beside Trace, never acknowledging the pilot's presence, just sitting down and brooding. Trace was smart enough not to say anything - the temperature in the

shuttle seemed to have dropped several degrees since his passengers had arrived.

The shuttle lifted off, and Max felt as if his heart was torn in two.

When the shuttle had left, Lily looked at Demon, who was standing with her mask-like face, her body rigid. But despite her efforts, she didn't completely succeed in suppressing her emotions. Lily could feel that she was just as desperate as she and Ilas were.

"Demon," she called out softly and reached out a hand, inviting her into the comfort of their embrace. Ilas did the same.

"Please! We need you!" Demon's mask began to crack, but she wouldn't move.

"Deborah..." Lily whispered, only realizing that she had used her sister's real name when it had left her mouth.

Demon flinched as if she'd been slapped, and her eyes started to fill with tears. Within moments, she flung herself into her sisters' arms, her body wracked by sobs.

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