

The Witches of Eriadne: Toil and Trouble - Part 1: Anticipation

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The Space Witches awaiting the arrival of the Excalibur crew

Chapter 2

It had been over four months since Angel had been down with the Apocalypse Box. And still she struggled, trying to remember what had happened. She remembered going down and sitting on the ground with it in front of her, and how she'd felt irresistibly drawn to it. How she'd tried to resist the urge to go to it, but had failed.

Angel shifted where she was sitting with her legs folded underneath her on the loveseat. She frowned, as again she couldn't stop herself from trying to remember. She'd found herself sitting on the floor, her head hurting and with a sense that something had just happened. Then she'd suddenly felt afraid; she'd had the feeling that Lucas had spoken to her. Not in her imagination like before, when he seemed to be calling her, drawing her to the Box. No, she knew that had just been all in her head. Imagined because she was missing him so much. But this time it was real. At that she'd jumped up, quickly closed the Box and placed it on the shelf and made a hasty exit, resetting the binding spell as she left. She hadn't been back, and she hadn't heard any voice since, real or imagined.

Angel closed her eyes and leaned her head back. She didn't know why she was thinking about this again. For some time now she'd managed to put it all behind her. To not think about Lucas. She sighed; it had taken a lot to get past those memories of Lucas, and to accept that he was gone. To even admit to herself, that it was for the best. Those first days had been hard; she'd missed Lucas so much it had felt like a physical pain. She'd wanted him back, but she knew that would never happen.

Angel opened her eyes, unfolded her legs and stood up. She started pacing as the thoughts kept coming. She'd been doing so well, she believed that she was over Lucas, but obviously she wasn't, or why else would she be thinking about him again? She kept pacing back and forth as she sighed heavily. Lucas wasn't the only one she was thinking about.

Gideon. She was also thinking about him. She stopped pacing and sat on the edge of her bed. She cast her mind back to the last time she'd seen Gideon in the library. Her stomach did a back flip at the memory of what had happened. She thought back on how she'd decided to go to the library, she always felt at peace there. And she'd stopped dead in her tracks when she'd seen Gideon standing there, her heart racing at the sight of him in black jeans and a gray T-shirt. She'd stood there watching him, thinking that she should go in and apologize to him for what she'd done. But when he'd turned around, suddenly all she wanted to do was get out of there. But he'd stopped her, barking at her and telling her that she owed him and others an apology. Instead of agreeing with him, she'd snapped, and told him she would apologize when she wanted to, and that he may be Captain on the Excalibur, but down here he was nothing. As soon as she'd said the words, she'd wished she could take them back. But then he'd yelled at her again.

Angel stood up again as she heard his words echoing in her head. "You really are a bitch you know. You don't care how much you hurt people do you? Me, your sister, anyone who gets in your way, you just trample over them to get what you want." She'd felt so hurt by his words that she'd struck out at him. And then... Angel shook her head, trying to clear her mind of what happened. But she couldn't, especially those last few moments. When she'd forgotten, because of the way he'd just taken her, that he wasn't Lucas, and she'd whispered that name in his ear. It hurt to remember how Gideon had pulled away from her then, looking at her with disgust and anger. His last words spoken with contempt.

"I'm not Lucas. Lucas is gone. And this will never happen again. You may hate your sister, but I don't." He'd left abruptly, leaving her lying there sobbing and feeling worse after what he'd said than after anything Lucas had ever done. She hadn't seen him again. The next day he and the others had left; she'd hidden herself away in her bedroom. She had no place down there saying goodbye, and besides that, she couldn't face Gideon. She'd been so angry and ashamed of herself. She knew that she had in that moment in the library, thought of Gideon as Lucas, and the brutal way he'd treated her had excited her.

Angel stopped pacing and buried her face in her hands. She felt like screaming. Dropping her hands she walked over to the fireplace and sat down amongst the large pillows. She stared into the flames that roared gently, the warmth from the fire soothing her body. She was so tired of all these thoughts; their confusion always gave her a headache.

She wondered again for the hundredth time about her feelings when it came to Lucas and Gideon. She could no longer decide if she was attracted to Gideon because he reminded her of Lucas, how could that be possible, they were so different really. The only thing she did know was that she had on many occasions been angry that Gideon wasn't Lucas. Yes, in looks, but not. And also that she wanted him because he wasn't Lucas. She remembered how she'd watched Gideon and Demon on the terrace that day. Seeing how loving and gentle he was with Demon. Everything that Lucas hadn't been with her.

Angel let out another sigh and lay down, her head resting on one of the soft velvet pillows. It really didn't matter anymore really. Lucas was gone, she no longer imagined hearing his voice. Which was probably the best thing for her. To get over Lucas. Also she knew that she had to forget Gideon and not let him get to her. She'd reinforced her promise to herself that never again would she do anything to hurt her sister. Gideon thought she hated Demon, but that was far from the truth, and her love for her sister was what was driving her to forget. And besides there was no point in wanting Gideon, he

hated her. She had to admit that after the scene in the library, she was angry with him and even angrier because he wasn't what she could never have again.

She had to get over him. Angel didn't want to think about it, but she knew that the Excalibur would be arriving any day now and she'd better be in a more positive frame of mind, and totally over him. She would be miserable otherwise, Gideon would be coming to be with Demon and it wouldn't do her any good to be in a mood. She didn't want to upset Demon, especially not now. She made a silent vow that no matter how much Gideon hated her, or showed his contempt for her, she wouldn't let it make her snap and cause her to fight with him. Even though Demon hadn't said anything to her, she knew that it would mean a lot to her sister for them to get along in a civil manner. She had to do that; her guilt over what had happened in the library with Gideon had almost eaten her alive. She could never tell her sister, so she had to make it up to her in other ways.

And it was for the best that she forget Lucas, she could never bring him back, someone would have to suffer, and she wouldn't have that on her conscience again.

Angel stared into the fire, watching the flames flicker and jump, only letting herself think about how she could make herself get past all those thoughts and finally get over all of it. At least she was kept busy with the village and her duties there; if she kept herself busy she wouldn't have time to think.

As she watched the flames dancing, Angel felt her eyes growing heavy, the fire lulling her towards sleep. She realized suddenly how tired she felt and curled up, hugging the pillow beneath her; she let herself gaze lazily into the fire until her eyes drooped closed and she slipped into a fitful sleep.

Demon paced the floor of her white room, becoming more nervous as the time passed. Nearly two days before, she'd returned to her rooms and found the message from Gideon. She'd called her sisters to tell them the exciting news and been delighted to see Lily and Ilas so happy. Angel took the news more calmly, but that was inevitable. She didn't have the same interest in the crew of the Excalibur as her sisters. Demon felt guilty about this again. When she'd asked Angel to give up Gideon she'd had no idea just how much she was asking Angel to sacrifice. What Angel had done then was hard to excuse, but Demon knew just how much Angel regretted what had followed.

But the result was that Angel had fallen in love with a man who'd been taken away from her forever and Gideon returning would re-open those wounds, as his appearance would be a constant reminder of what she'd lost. It was a horrible situation, in which either Angel or Demon had to lose the man they loved, they couldn't both be happy. Guilt washed over Demon again as she realised that she wanted Matthew more than she wanted her sister's happiness. What sort of person did that make her? Selfish, but she couldn't help it.

She'd tried to call the Excalibur to tell them how welcome they would be but had been unable to get the Comm. equipment to work. She was sure she was doing exactly what she'd been instructed to do but just couldn't get through. But none of that mattered now. Matthew was coming back! But would he still want her? The thought of him being there and not wanting her was torment. She remembered the short time they'd been together when the Excalibur had visited them. They'd spent less than four days together in all, but during that time Demon had fallen hopelessly in love with him. She'd tried not to let him see how strongly she felt, thinking it would frighten him off, but she now wondered if he might have thought she didn't care.

She knew that the outward appearance of calm and control she projected fooled most people into

thinking that she was cool and remote. Had she fooled Gideon as well? Did he think she had just wanted sex with him? Which she did, but that wasn't all she wanted. But she did want his body as much as anything else. She'd never been so aroused by a man. Just the sight of him would make her breasts sore and her nipples harden. Just thinking about some of the things they'd done together made her wet inside. Standing by her windows looking out she realised that she was aroused now; just watching his message and thinking about him made her want him, all of him, as deep inside her as she could get him.

[Stop it!] She took a deep breath and brought herself back under control. It was a good thing she wasn't sending these days or half the castle would have known that she was having erotic thoughts again.

So now he was coming back. To see her? Or was it Angel he wanted? She couldn't forget how she'd sensed him and Angel together when he first arrived in the castle. She knew how much he'd enjoyed Angel despite [or because of?] the pain she'd caused him. And he'd been with Angel again when Demon had been busy hunting Dureena, so closely focused on Dureena that she hadn't sensed his feelings then. Then as Lucas he'd taken Angel for his own. How much of that did he remember? How much of that was driven by Lucas' mind and how much by Matthew's body? She tried not to let these thoughts fill her with doubts, remembering how things had been during their last two days together. He'd been warm, loving, kind and caring. As far as she knew, he and Angel had only met once during that period, and then they'd fought. She wished they could have dealt with the issues that lay between them. She'd sensed a lot of anger from Gideon towards Angel. She wished she could sense her sister's feelings, to know how Angel felt about Gideon.

Her thoughts turned to Angel and she paced again. Her sister had not been the same since the Excalibur had left. She'd always been headstrong and reckless, but that was what gave her life and energy. She was a brightly burning flame that could warm or burn. But that flame had been quenched recently. Angel had been subdued, withdrawn from her sisters, often leaving them for long periods when they didn't know where she went or what she did. She still carried out her duties in the village diligently, helping the villagers when they fell ill or were injured. But the enjoyment she'd got from giving that help seemed to have left her. Demon decided that was the whole problem; Angel didn't seem to get any joy from anything she did any more.

As she thought this Demon's anger grew. Her hatred of Lucas had grown over the last few months. Although he hadn't really hurt her when they'd been together, he'd been rough and she remembered the injuries Raven had healed for her. What made her ashamed was remembering how much she'd enjoyed what he'd done. He was so different to Matthew, but it was Matthew's body that had used her, and she'd taken everything he'd given, relishing every moment. It was only later when it became apparent that it had *not* been Matthew she'd been with, that her shame and anger grew.

The hatred had started when he'd hurt Lily; Demon was very protective of her sisters, especially Lily who was so tiny. She knew that Lily could take care of herself, but the thought of how Lucas had grasped her neck and threatened to break it made her temper rise, and the fact that he looked like Matthew doing it, only made it worse. Lucas had made a bad enemy that day. She'd thought it was over when they put him back where he belonged, and it was only her fundamental respect for life that had made her support Angel when Galen wanted to destroy the Box. She honestly believed that everyone was redeemable, even Lucas in time.

There had been times since then, seeing Angel sad and withdrawn, when she'd regretted that decision and wished they'd burned the bastard. It also worried her that Galen had entrusted them with the Box only because Demon could sense if Lucas ever tried to escape and take over another body as he'd done

with Matthew. But she couldn't do that any more, and it concerned her.

Which brought her thoughts back in a circle. What would Matthew say when he saw her? Would he still want her? Or would he turn around and walk out without a word? She heard rumbles of thunder; no, not thunder, the shuttle's engines. Time was up, she'd find out soon enough.

Lily was too excited to sit or stand still. One minute she lay on the hides and cushions in her lounging pit, the next she sat on the windowsill playing her harp, or lay on the bed, or aimlessly walked around in her room. Not even her book of spells - or any other book from their extensive library, for that matter - could hold her in place. All the time her green eyes were blazing. She'd been in this state for two days now, almost unable to eat, and when she did she had to force herself to take in as much food as her body needed. Despite getting only a handful of hours sleep the past nights, she'd never felt more awake.

[They're coming!] She thought for probably the hundredth time, beaming.

Lily had been contentedly playing her harp when Demon had called all of them together. She'd felt excitement in her sister's sending, and when she'd heard the news she'd shared it, along with Ilas. Only Angel had taken the news calmly.

Lily's smile gave way to a sad and worried expression. [Angel... how will she get along with Gideon this time? Oh, if only she had someone too...]

But with the memory of the Excalibur's Captain came the memory of his first officer, and the time she'd spent with him and Raven. [Oh, if only I knew if Luke will be with them...] she thought. [I had the feeling that they'd both come when Demon told us, but maybe that was only because they were here together last time, and because I *want* them both to come. Then again, knowing John... Oh, I'll see when they arrive!]

She walked over to her four-poster bed and fell back on the mattress, letting her mind wander while her right hand unconsciously massaged her belly. Four months had passed since the Excalibur had left Eriadne B, but from time to time she'd had the feeling, always just for a moment, that John or Raven or both of them were here with her. It hadn't only happened in her room, but also when she was in her bath, outside, or in the village teaching the Brakiri children to sing and play instruments. One time, about two weeks after they'd left, she'd been to one of her favorite places, a small lake and waterfall in a nearby grove. She'd taken a swim and was resting on a stone near the waterfall when she'd suddenly felt so aroused that her hand slid between her thighs before she realized it, and she'd come with gut-wrenching intensity. She could have sworn, if she hadn't known it was impossible, that John and Luke had been there, making love to her...

Lily sighed happily.

[They're coming!]

Ilas sat in front of the mirror in her bathroom, thinking about Max and Dureena. They'd had *such* fun together during their last visit. She remembered all the things she and Max had done together, here in her rooms, outside the castle, in the shuttle... her pale blue nipples stood out from her full breasts in

excitement.

And it had got better! Once Dureena had joined them Ilas had discovered what it was like to be a male making love to a female. She'd never done that before. She'd taken on the form of a male many times, but the things she'd done as a male, first with Max alone then with Max and Dureena, had been entirely new and *very* exciting. She wondered whether she should wear her Zanderi male body to greet them.

She stood in front of the mirror and watched herself ripple as she changed form. She changed very, very carefully these days. It was difficult to change her external appearance while keeping her internal organs unaffected, but she was now practiced at it. The Zanderi male she now saw in the mirror was handsome by his species standards, and Dureena had told her that she was very well endowed! Ilas giggled as she looked down at the Zanderi male reproductive organs. They didn't look anything special to her, not like Max... She bit her lip as she remembered what it had been like the first time Max made love to her in the bath and felt herself becoming aroused. She looked down and giggled again. Being a male certainly had disadvantages. *Everyone* could tell when a man was excited.

No. Although Dureena might like it, Ilas decided against the male Zanderi form. Too much effort to maintain. So what else could she do? She smiled again and shifted, watching her legs grow longer, her breasts become heavier and her hair grew, curled and changed color. In a moment she looked at Demon in the mirror. Wouldn't it be fun to see Captain Gideon's reaction if there were two Demons waiting for him? Ilas thought he'd probably faint at the thought of what he'd have to do to keep two Demons happy. Perhaps one of her other sisters? Her legs shrank and her whole body contracted, while her hair grew even longer and the shade darkened to red. How would John and Luke react if they each had their own Lily? But Max wouldn't be amused if she ran off with John again. She smiled as she remembered the brief time she'd spent with John Matheson. That *had* been fun!

But it wasn't John she wanted to please. It was Max. Which form would please Max most? She shifted back to her blue form. Her face as white as alabaster, her eyes lavender, her hair the palest blue. She looked down, blue all over. She giggled again. But was this his favorite? No.

She allowed herself to relax completely and stood looking at her natural form. She rarely showed this face in public. Dark lavender hair and red eyes, golden skin with full breasts and a narrow waist. Leaning forward she looked more closely in the mirror, running her fingers down the scar on her cheek. She wondered how it had happened, having no memory of events before she joined with her sisters. They'd told her that she already had the scar when they first saw her, so they couldn't tell her how it had happened. Max liked this body. And when he'd made love to her in that form it had been especially wonderful.

She made her decision. This was the body she would wear to greet Max, her own.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Toil and Trouble

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