

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

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Max, Ilas and Dureena

Chapter 2

Ilas made her way to the bridge, following the instructions that Galen and Dureena had given her. She wished one of them could have come with her, but knew that they were all needed in the landing bay if their plan was to work. It had to work! She wondered where Max was. She knew he was on the ship somewhere and she desperately wanted to see him again. Perhaps after she had done what was needed on the bridge she could go looking for him. No, she was needed in the landing bay; Max would have to wait.

Walking through the corridors and riding the bullet car as Gideon was a strange experience. Members of the crew she met nodded or saluted and she had to remember to acknowledge them in some way, as Galen had instructed her. The strangest part was knowing that she was walking those corridors stark naked while simulating the Captain's uniform. It was exciting to think of being naked in front of all these people. She wished that Max could be there to see her. She knew that this would have aroused him as much as it did her.

At last she arrived on the bridge. It seemed to have taken her forever; she hadn't realised how big the ship was. Her worst fear was that when she arrived "Gideon" would still be there. They'd discussed whether she should go there in a different disguise and change when she got there. But Galen had told them there was nowhere safe that she could change. So she'd taken the risk of going as Gideon.

The gamble paid off. "Gideon" was nowhere in sight. The watch officer turned in his seat as she entered.

"Captain? I thought you decided to call it a day?" Ilas took a deep breath and launched into the speech Galen had prepared for her, with help from Dureena.

"I had, but decided to stop in on Eilerson on my way. He's been working on the instruments we picked up on the planet and it looks as if they're more advanced than we thought. They may even hold the clue to a cure. Looks like we left too soon. There may be more there that we can use. We're going to have to go back."

She turned towards the part of the bridge they'd told her was helm.

"Turn us around and take us back to Eriadne. Call me in my quarters when we're ready to return to normal space."

"Aye, sir."

Ilas turned quickly, concentrating on walking like Gideon, and left the bridge, headed for the landing bay. Now for the grand finale. She just hoped that Angel could do her part.

Lucas stood for moment thinking. Looked like he'd misjudged Angel's submission to him. Well, he'd take care of that. No one crossed Lucas Buck and got away with it. He considered for a moment how he would make her pay for this. Obviously she had gone with Magic Man. Lucas cursed. No, he wouldn't kill her. That would be too easy. But he would kill her sisters. Pity; he'd have liked to spend some quality time with Demon. Oh yes, he'd make her watch as her precious sisters died before her eyes, sucked out of an airlock. Then he'd keep her alive with the knowledge that their deaths were her fault. And after that he would break her spirit, until she would kill an entire race to please him if he asked.

But right now he had to find his wayward little Angel and that damn Technomage before they did anything to threaten his plans. Lucas cursed again. This day was giving him a headache.

Lucas spun on his heel, but just as he reached the door he stopped, narrowing his eyes. Sensing someone outside, he closed his eyes, letting his mind feel whoever it was. He opened his eyes slowly. [Well, ain't this a surprise?] A predatory smile played across his lips. "Like a lamb to the slaughter," he drawled dangerously.

Angel approached the door to Gideon's cabin slowly. Her desire to turn and bolt almost overpowered her. [No Angel! You have to do this! You can do this!] she thought, trying to give herself the courage she needed. She couldn't believe she was doing this. God, she hoped he was back so that she could get it over with while she still had the strength. If she had to go in there and wait... [NO! Galen said that he'd be there by now] That didn't exactly thrill her either. In

fact, it scared her to death.

Angel finally came to a stop in front of the door, taking a moment to gather her wits. It was going to take everything she had to go in there and face Lucas, not pass out in fright, which is exactly what she felt like doing right now. [Breathe, Angel, just breathe.] She took a few long, deep breaths. [Let's get it over with.]

Angel reached her hand out to press the comm button, her arm freezing in midair, when the door slid open. She looked up, her throat contracting tightly as she saw Lucas standing inside. She had seen a dangerous look in his eyes before, but the way he was looking at her now almost froze her blood.

"Oh, Lucas," she cried as she ran inside, throwing her arms around him, holding onto him tightly.

Lucas had stood there watching Angel, as she stood apparently rooted to the ground. He was sure he saw a distinct look of fear in her eyes, and for a moment he thought she was going to bolt. Not that she would have escaped him if she had. Then he watched with some surprise as she flung herself into his arms.

Angel held on tightly to Lucas, who just stood there, unmoving and quiet. Then she felt his hands gripping her wrists and pulling them away. She winced as his grip tightened painfully and he pushed her slightly away from him. When she looked into his eyes her courage almost failed her. [If looks could kill...] When he spoke, his voice was low and steely with controlled anger.

"You obviously want your sisters to die, Angel-face."

"Lucas, please, I can explain. Please, your life is in danger," pleaded Angel, silently praying that her words would get his attention. She had to make him listen to her. She moved in closer, her arms crushing between them. "Please, I didn't want to go, he made me. Please, Lucas you must listen to me." She tried to reach his face, but his hands still tight around her wrists immobilized her. She just hoped that he would notice the gesture.

Lucas stood taking in Angel and everything she said in silence. Something was going on here, and he was going to let her tell him. He could feel her trembling, her eyes filled with desperation and fear. [Good! Let's find out what the hell is going on here.] He let go of her wrists suddenly and moved away from her. He stood leaning up against the wall, watching her squirm under his silent scrutiny for a minute before he spoke.

"This better be good darlin'. 'Cause if it ain't, you'll watch your sisters die, then for the rest of your life you'll live to regret defying me again. And I'll make damn sure that life is long and full of pain."

Angel swallowed convulsively. She felt dizzy. She cleared her throat nervously, while Lucas stood watching her, [God, I wish he wouldn't look at me that way.] "I, Lucas, I'm sorry I couldn't kill him, I wanted to. You have to believe that. But I am not a murderer. I just couldn't do it." She

paused to look at Lucas who arched an eyebrow up at her.

"What's the matter, Angel-face, cat got your tongue?" drawled Lucas

Angel jumped at his voice, and cursed herself for having been silent long enough for him to goad her. She shook her head, even managed a smile. "No, Lucas. It's just that I know how angry you must be with me. I'm frightened."

Lucas looked at her, and she could see he was pleased. [Good, now carry on before he stops being patient and decides to pounce.] Angel forced herself to walk up to him, where she placed her hands on his chest, leaning into him slightly. "Oh Lucas, I was so angry with you and afraid. When Galen caught me, he threatened to kill me if I didn't tell him what was going on. I broke down Lucas. I told him about you." She cried out as he grabbed her by the neck and turning, slammed her into the wall. He towered over her, his face a mask of rage.

"You did what?" he hissed.

Angel struggled to speak against the death grip he had on her throat, her hand trying to pull it away. "Please, Lucas let me finish, your life depends on it." She managed to gasp out the words. She was feeling close to passing out now. Sure that she was going to die, she looked up, her blue eyes pleading. With her free hand she reached up to stroke his face, hoping that it would prove to him that she was telling the truth.

Lucas looked at Angel, felt her hand on his cheek. He was struggling to control the rage inside. Her telling Galen about him was a threat to his existence. But he was interested to know why she'd come back, and just exactly what she meant about his life depending on his listening to her. Something was going on here, and before he did anything with her, he was going to find out what it was. He let go of her throat and backed away from her.

Angel fell back against the wall, her hand at her bruised throat. When she spoke her voice was strained, and she had to clear her throat before she could carry on. Lucas was just standing there, eyeing her suspiciously. She didn't know whether she should be relieved that he wasn't saying much to her, or afraid. She decided that while he was saying nothing, she better just hurry up and tell him everything.

With a nervous start, while Lucas watched her, his hazel eyes cold and predatory Angel explained to him that she had told Galen everything, that he promised to help her get free and that he could get her sisters out of the brig, that he would protect all of them from Lucas. She carried on under Lucas's watchful eyes, telling how she and Galen had got out of the cabin taking the Apocalypse Box with them. Lucas whipped around to look at the cupboard where the Apocalypse Box had been; he saw the damage that had been done to the lock and turned back to Angel, his face set in stone. Angel found that the more she spoke, the less afraid she became. She went on to tell Lucas how they had freed her sisters, how she'd told them that it was her spell that had brought him here. How Demon forgave her for what she had done. At that bit of information he gave a small, dry laugh and said sarcastically, "How sweet."

Angel ignored him and went on with her story. She explained that her sisters and Galen had come up with a reverse spell that would send him back where he came from. It didn't escape her notice

that Lucas's eyes narrowed, almost imperceptibly, at that bit of news. She then told him that they were all in the landing bay where they were preparing to work a spell with the Apocalypse Box. When she finished telling him that, she gave a small sigh of relief that she had managed to get it all out before he killed her.

Lucas stood for what seemed like ages before he approached her. It took amazing control on her behalf not to back away from him.

"So, they're planning to kick me back into oblivion, are they?" he asked quietly.

Angel nodded. Lucas reached for her face cupping it in his hands. "And tell me Angel-face, being so afraid and angry with me, why aren't you there with them, helping them try to get rid of me?"

Angel smiled, raising her hands to where Lucas's were still holding her face. Placing hers over his and looking up into his eyes. "Because I realised that I couldn't help them destroy you. I love you, Lucas. I'm yours, body and soul."

"Really?" asked Lucas dryly.

Angel smiled sadly and moved her hands to his face. "Oh Lucas in my heart, in my soul I know what you are. But I don't care. I don't want to be without you." She pushed herself on tiptoes, bringing Lucas's head down so that she could seal her words with a kiss. She was about to deepen the kiss, but Lucas pulled her face away.

"So, Angel-face, you came here to tell me what they are planning. To save my life, is that it?" Angel could tell by his tone that he hadn't bought what she was saying completely. Her heart raced, she had to convince him, and deep down she knew that every word she'd said had been true.

"Yes, Lucas, I couldn't live without you." She paused to let a finger trace along his lips.

Lucas stood thinking for a moment. So Angel Face was still with him. Well, that didn't mean he wasn't going to punish her for her disobedience. She was still too independent, her spirit a little too free and he had to own her totally. Though it did please him that she was obviously still under his control; her betrayal of her sisters was proof of that. Still, they may not be able to get rid of him with a spell, but they were a threat to him. There was no way he could let them carry on with their plan. And he still needed to get rid of the Technomage.

"So, now you know who really loves you, who you belong to?" asked Lucas, looking into her face intensely.

"You, Lucas. Only you." Angel felt his hand snake to the back of her neck, where he pulled her forward, claiming her mouth. Angel let his tongue part her lips and slip inside. She couldn't deny how wonderful his kiss was as his tongue danced with hers. She didn't want to fight it, either. After a long moment Lucas broke the kiss, his hand still around her neck.

"They're in the landing bay now?" Angel nodded, letting her hands rest on his chest.

"Well, I can't let them get away with this." Angel grabbed hold of the collar of his jacket.

"Please don't go there Lucas. They could hurt you if you go after them. By now they know I'm gone. They'll know I've come to warn you. They'll be waiting for you." Angel spoke every word in a rush, her voice desperate.

Lucas pried her fingers from his jacket. "Wrong, darlin' they could hurt me with that spell. I can't let them do that."

"Lucas..." began Angel, but he cut her off.

"Not tryin' to stall me, so they can get on with their work, are you?"

Angel shook her head, her pulse pounding in her ears. He suspected something "NO... yes! I mean, please just let them go. They're my sisters, I don't want them harmed."

Lucas smiled at her. "Don't worry, Angel-face, I won't kill your sisters. Consider it a reward for coming back to me. But I can't let them get away with this."

Lucas moved away, heading for the door. Angel ran after him, grabbing his arm. "Lucas please don't go down there, at least not alone. Take some men with you. My sisters and Galen may have PPG's. If you go down there, they'll kill you." She held on tight to his arm, her eyes pleading with him.

"I can take care of this alone. I don't want any crewmen finding out what they shouldn't," said Lucas as he pulled Angel's hand off his arm.

"Lucas, please, you can't do this alone. God, I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you."

Lucas chuckled. "This is Lucas Buck you're talking to." He bent down to brush a thumb down Angel's cheek. Once he had taken care of the problem in the landing bay, he intended to come back and reward her. Hard. Danger was a strong aphrodisiac for him.

He straightened up and headed toward the door again. Angel's voice stopped him. He turned his head to look at her. "Lucas, don't do this, please." She was actually crying now, the tears cool against her flushed face. Lucas didn't say anything, just turned around. "Wait!" When he looked back a small frown creased his brow, he was getting impatient with her now. Was she stalling him on purpose?

Angel ran to him, taking hold of his hand. "I'll go with you. Maybe if they see me with you, it'll slow them down." She held her breath.

"Well then, let's go, Angel-face. We got us a little mutiny to put down."

Galen stood up from where he'd drawn the pentagram on the floor of the landing bay. They'd decided that this was the only place on the Excalibur that was big enough to contain the forces

they planned to unleash. Dureena was standing to one side watching as Galen, Lily and Demon worked.

Galen had drawn the outline, carefully ensuring that each external triangle was identical to the others. The slightest imbalance in the shape would disturb the vortex they planned to create. Lily and Demon each took a triangular corner and started marking them with the necessary words. The writing they used was one that Dureena had never seen before, but Galen and the women all seemed familiar with it. That discovery had left Galen sulking for several minutes. He'd obviously thought that knowledge of those powers was restricted to his order. Dureena started to muse about whether Ilas would teach her some of their powers. Maybe she didn't have to wait for Galen to teach her after all.

She brought her attention back to the present and watched as Galen started work on his own triangle just as Lily and Demon each completed their first and moved onto a second. Time was now critical. They had to complete their work before Angel returned with "Gideon," but the powers they were working with could not be left unused for long. Once they had finished the pentagram it would take the energies of all three of them just to hold back the forces they'd created until "Gideon" arrived. And the spell would be most powerful when used at ship's midnight, which was now fast approaching.

As they neared completion of their work Galen looked up at Dureena. "Time for you to go." Dureena had protested when they told her she couldn't stay for the expulsion, but had eventually given in when they told her that her presence could prevent them from completing their "spell". If they had to worry about another person being swept up by the vortex and had to protect that person, it could weaken them and lead to disaster. Dureena nodded.

"My people don't believe in luck. But if we did, I'd wish you good luck now." She left the landing bay and headed for Max's quarters. Her job now was to release Max, then to take him to the Medbay. There they would do their best to protect Matheson. Galen and the sisters had been concerned that Lucas would try to take someone with him when they expelled him, and in Matheson's present weakened state, he was the most vulnerable. Dureena wasn't sure what she and Max could do, but she was going to try her best. She grinned when she remembered the brief time she had spent with Matheson when he joined them in Ilas's quarters. That memory provided quite an incentive to keep the young lieutenant alive.

Galen, Demon and Lily completed their work on the pentagram. Galen stood and walked to where he'd left the Apocalypse Box. As he lifted it, he spoke, "Not long now Matthew. Soon you'll either be back in your own body or I'll be joining you in there." Galen knew that was the risk that he and the sisters were taking. If this went wrong or if Lucas was too powerful for them, their own souls could be forced from their bodies to join Matthew in the Box. He placed the Box carefully at the dead centre of the pentagram then checked the chronometer on the wall of the landing bay. Ten minutes to midnight. He moved to stand by the corner of the pentagram that he was to occupy and watched as Lily and Demon did the same. Now they just had to wait.

At five minutes to midnight Ilas flew through the door to the landing bay, still in her Gideon appearance. She watched as Galen and her sisters flinched at the sight of her and realised that she should have changed on her way back. They thought she was Lucas!

"It's me, it's me!" she yelled in her own voice as she saw Galen start to move his hands to attack her. They all relaxed. Galen spoke quietly.

"Perhaps next time you could call out first? Then we wouldn't all be needing replacement heart valves at this point." Ilas smiled meekly up at him as she shifted from Gideon into her natural form -- not her usual blue-haired appearance, but her real shape. She would need all her energies to work with the others on the spell; she'd have none left for maintaining a different shape.

"Sorry."

Galen was fascinated as her real appearance emerged. Like Max, he recognized her species and realised what the Vorlon had worked with. The genetic tampering necessary to produce Ilas was nevertheless impressive.

He moved back to his corner of the pentagram and watched as Ilas took up her place, her nakedness not disturbing her in the slightest. Only one corner remained empty. They needed Angel now. Five minutes to go.

Lucas rushed down the corridors separating him from the landing bay, holding Angel's arm, but half surprised that she was moving as fast as him. He sensed the urgency she felt but still wasn't sure. Was she as desperate to save him as she appeared, or was she setting him up? He half threw her into a bullet car and stood impatiently by the door waiting for it to arrive at their destination.

He wanted to get to the landing bay before they'd completed their preparations. If he could catch them before they'd finished, before they had all the appropriate guards in place, he could turn their own spell on them and send them to join Gideon in the Box. Then he'd be able to keep his promise to Angel. He wouldn't hurt them. There'd be no need. Empty shells were no threat to him. And as long as he had Angel with him, they couldn't complete the pentagram that he guessed they were building.

Damned Technomage! The women had been powerful enough on their own if they ever linked. That was one reason he'd spent so much time on Angel, twisting her into submission, making her his toy. Without their fourth part the women were powerless. But with the Technomage to replace Angel, they could be a threat. If Angel hadn't betrayed their plans to him, he could have been in trouble. But with Angel on his side he could beat them.

The bullet car slowed and stopped. Lucas dragged Angel out of the car into the corridor and set off at a flat run toward the landing bay.

One minute to mid-night.

Lucas paused at the door to the landing bay, trying to sense what was waiting for him. Nothing. He guessed that Luscious Lily was using her blocking powers. He turned to Angel. "You go in first and distract them, I'll follow. This is your last chance, Angel-face, help me now and you'll find out just how good Lucas Buck can be to his friends. Defy me and there'll be no end to the pain you'll feel, not in this life or the next. I can make your afterlife a livin' hell." Angel drew herself up and leaned against his chest, tilting her head up and offering her mouth to be kissed.

"I'll never forget that Lucas. Never." He leant down and kissed her hard, then turned her and patted her backside as he pushed her towards the door. It slid open.

Lucas followed hard behind Angel as she entered, using her body as a shield against whatever might be inside. As he expected, Galen and the other sisters were holding position on four of the five points of a pentagram. His eyes were drawn briefly to the shape-shifter who'd assumed the form he'd seen when she said goodbye to Max, but this time she was naked. Lucas's eyes flickered briefly over her body.

It was the moment of distraction Angel needed to dart away from him. He lunged after her, but although his fingertips grazed her arm she was just out of reach as she reached her point of the pentagram, the one nearest the door, left deliberately open for her. As soon as her feet hit the point, a force field sprang up surrounding the five-pointed star on the floor, enclosing those standing within its boundaries. Lucas bounced off the force field as he tried to grab Angel back.

The lid of the Apocalypse Box started to open. Galen and the sisters stood rigid at the points of the star, their eyes closed and heads thrown back. Every part of them was now concentrated on forming the vortex that could draw Lucas back.

Lucas retreated, trying to escape the effects of the spell they were weaving, but as the vortex formed above the Box, his feet started to slide against the deck and he was drawn in. He summoned all the powers he possessed to fight them, and the force field flickered as he threw everything he had at it. He regained his footing and made a yard of progress back towards the door.

A hole appeared above the now fully open box, glowing the same yellow as the box itself. The hole had an internal structure of swirling colors; a howling wind emerged from its centre and lightening flickered around the pentagram. A single bolt lashed out and stabbed Lucas in the centre of his chest. It emerged from the centre of his back and wrapped around his body drawing him towards the box. Lucas screamed in agony. He felt as if a spear had been thrust through his body and the barbs were now pulling him in. His feet kicked frantically against the floor, trying desperately to regain his footing, but he slid inexorably onwards.

As his body came into contact with the force field a shower of sparks was hurled into the atmosphere. The air was filled with the smell of burning flesh as his hands blackened where he pushed against the field. As he was dragged through, he made one final lunge sideways. His hand just reached a lock of Angel's hair and he grasped it firmly.

Angel screamed as her head was pulled forward by Lucas's grip. She knew if he succeeded in shifting her from her position on the point, the vortex would shift and they would all be lost. She grabbed Lucas's hand and tried to pry his fingers from her hair, but they were locked tight. She looked into his eyes as he was dragged closer to the howling centre of the star.

"If I'm goin', I'm taking you with me Angel-face. See you in hell," were his final words to her.

She was screaming in pain as his grip on her hair dragged her head forward and she could feel herself slipping. Suddenly the lock of hair came out at the roots, taking a piece of bleeding scalp with it. Lucas flew across the star and landed on his back, spread eagled across the Box. A spear of lightening shot straight up through him, forcing a human shape of light up into the air, out of his body. The shape lost form and was sucked back into the lightening bolt, which collapsed back through the body into the Box. The body spread across the Box was thrown into the air, out of the pentagram. The lid of the Box slammed down.

Demon fell to her knees as the vortex closed and the force field collapsed. She crawled to where Gideon's body lay. She was barely aware that Galen and her sisters had also fallen and were lying stunned on the deck. She reached Gideon and placed her hand on his chest. He wasn't breathing; his heart had stopped.

She clamped her mouth over his and exhaled completely into his lungs. She felt his chest lift beneath her, and so lifted her head and took another deep breath, which again she gave him completely. She was vaguely aware of being moved off his chest and hands coming down hard over his heart. Galen pounded on Gideon's rib cage as Demon breathed for him.

She heard Lily's voice yelling something about needing medical help, but she didn't let it distract her from her sole purpose. She would not let him die. She could hear Angel crying in pain and Ilas comforting her. Then she began to feel dizzy and everything started to go gray. She felt herself being lifted and Ilas's voice said, "Breathe Demon, breathe for yourself." She struggled against Ilas's hands, but her sister had transformed herself into a large Minbari, whose strength was significantly greater than hers. She fell back, gasping for air and watched as the Minbari took over breathing for Gideon. She could see Galen massaging Gideon's chest. She knew that she was completely out of control and was sending waves of panic and grief throughout the ship.

Luke Raven burst through the doors of the landing bay with a medical team at his heels. They pushed Galen and Ilas to one side and went to work on Gideon.

Demon felt arms around her and realised that Angel was holding her, trying to comfort her as she watched the medical team work on Gideon's lifeless body. Demon buried her head in Angel's shoulder and sobbed.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Double, Double

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