

# The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn - Part 2: Present

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Angel and Lucas's relationship is about to change drastically...

## Chapter 2

Angel was sitting curled up on the couch reading a book when she heard the door opening. She looked up and smiled as Lucas entered the room. Placing the book face down on the couch, she stood up and flowed into his arms. "You said you wouldn't be gone long, Lucas," said Angel against his shoulder as he held her tightly in his arms.

Lucas held her for a moment and then holding her upper arms, pushed her away so he could look down at her. "My meeting took a little longer than expected," he said softly as he brushed her hair away from her face. "Miss me?"

Angel smiled, and reaching her hands up to his face, she pulled his head down so she could give him a hard, passionate kiss. After several moments she broke away. "Does that answer your question?" she asked, slightly breathless from the kiss.

Lucas pulled her in closer for a moment, giving her a brief hug before moving away to remove his jacket and sit on the couch. Angel watched him for a moment and then moved over to join him.

"Lucas?" she began softly, a little nervous about how he might react to her curiosity.

"Yes, darlin'?" She gained courage to continue when he turned to her and smiled.

She returned his smile, letting her hand rest on his thigh, watching it for a moment before she went on. "How did the meeting go? Did you get the ship?"

Lucas smiled [That's a good girl] He'd been expecting this question. He placed his hand over hers and stared across the room, making it appear that he was lost in thought. He let her call his name twice before he finally turned his attention to her.

"Lucas, is something wrong?" she asked with concern.

"Yes and no, Angel-Face," he said heavily. Patting her hand, he stood up and moved over to his desk, where he turned and sat on the edge, facing her. She stood, a look of worry on her face.

"I don't understand, Lucas. Didn't Mr. Smith want to sell you the ship?" Angel walked up to him and placed a hand on his arm.

Lucas watched her response to his words. He could see her mind working. [Time to get the show on the road.] "No, darlin'. Mr. Smith wants to sell me the ship." He watched her frown, but didn't give her the chance to voice her thoughts as he continued, "But there's a slight catch to the deal." He spoke the last few words with emphasis, and waited for her to take the bait. She didn't disappoint him.

"I don't understand, Lucas. What catch?" Angel's voice was uncertain, her instinct was telling her that something was very wrong here, and that she wasn't going to like whatever coming next, but she considered it to be paranoia and pushed it aside.

Lucas said nothing for a moment and then straightened up to walk over to the porthole. For a moment he watched the activity outside before turning back to her. "The hitch is, darlin', that Mr. Smith wants something in addition--call it a bonus--to the payment he wants for his ship. And I just don't think you're going to be willing to do it." He looked at her pointedly, pleased to see her face drain of color.

Angel's throat suddenly went dry and she swallowed convulsively. "What...what does this have to do with me, Lucas?" she asked nervously.

Lucas approached her, stopping just a few feet away. "Well, Mr. Smith saw you with me last night at dinner and you see, darlin', he is completely taken with you."

Angel was feeling more and more nervous. "Lucas, I still don't know what this has to do with me and getting the ship?"

Lucas let out a soft sigh, crossing his arms and fixing her with a strange expression. "Actually, Angel-Face, it has everything to do with you. You see, Mr. Smith will only sell me the ship," he paused and then continued, his voice steely, "if you spend the night with him."

Angel's head snapped up and her eyes widened in shock as she realized what he was saying. She shook her head in disbelief. "Oh no, Lucas. Please, not that." Her voice was barely a whisper as she looked pleadingly at him.

Lucas unfolded his arms and moved closer to her. "Exactly that, darlin'. You see, that's the only way

we get the ship."

Angel digested what he was saying. She felt sparks of rebellion ignite; she couldn't do this. "I won't do it, Lucas. I won't sleep with a man just to get a ship. Please. There has to be another way."

Lucas approached her and placed his hands on her shoulders. "This is the only way, darlin'. Smith won't sell me the ship unless you sleep with him." Lucas watched her closely as she stood deathly quiet in front of him, then he saw her eyes getting brighter. [Here comes the rebellion,] he thought.

Angel felt anger starting to well up inside her. She looked up at him "No, Lucas. I won't do it!" she uttered vehemently as she tried to move away from him. She cried out in pain as he grabbed her upper arms in a vice-like grip, not letting her move, his expression ruthless.

"You're forgetting that I own you, darlin', body and soul, and you'll do whatever I tell you to do." Angel's heart contracted at the cold tone in his voice, but something in her snapped and she started fighting wildly against his hold.

"I don't care! I won't do it. If you love me, you won't ask me to do something like this!" she screamed in anguish. Her breath was knocked out of her as he slammed her back onto the desk, using his weight to pin her down.

His face was inches away from her as he leaned against her. "If you love me, darlin', then you'll do whatever it takes to make us happy. Don't you want us to go back to Eriadne and make a life for ourselves there together? Well, the only way to get there is by having a ship. Smith is willing to sell his ship without the sale being registered and the transactions would therefore be untraceable. And the only way we're going to get that ship is if you do your part." Lucas suddenly let her go and straightened up, moving away from her.

Angel stared at the floor as she thought painfully about what he wanted her to do. She was totally devastated; Lucas was basically telling her that she had to prostitute herself in order to get a ship. She raised her eyes from the floor and glanced at him, and she realized with deep sadness that she didn't have a choice. She sighed and closed her eyes for a moment before opening them again. Her voice was emotionless as she spoke, "All right, Lucas. I'll do it."

A slow smile crept across his lips and he walked over to Angel and took hold of one of her hands. "Darlin', it won't be that bad. And when it's all done, we'll have our ride home."

Angel felt her throat burn with unshed tears at the now-gentle tone in Lucas' voice. She knew it was only because he had what he wanted. She looked up at him and nodded. "When do you want me to go and see him?" she asked with difficulty.

Lucas hid a smile of satisfaction as he lowered his head to give her a brief kiss. "He's waiting for you in his quarters now." He watched her closely, expecting her to resist having to go right now. He was mildly surprised when she nodded.

"All right, Lucas. I'll just go and get ready," she said softly as she made a move towards the bedroom.

Lucas watched the door close, then moved to sit back down on the couch, thinking about her. He was surprised that she had agreed so easily. He knew that it was mostly out of fear, which pleased him. Lately, she'd been showing a strong streak of independence by standing up to him. Her giving in to him proved to him that he still had control over her, despite her spirit, but that didn't mean he was

confident about it and sure beyond a doubt that she would carry it out. She'd given into him with Galen, yet had gone against him in the end. If she didn't get Smith to sell the ship, he would be sure he was losing his grip on her, and he would have to take measures to bring her back under control.

Lucas leaned back against the couch, resting his arm on the back as he listened to her movements in the other room. His thoughts drifted back to his meeting with Smith. The man was a first-class sleaze, and if he didn't need to get his hands on his ship, he would have taken delight in destroying him. When Smith had agreed to the sale, provided he got to sleep with Angel, Lucas had agreed. But of course he wasn't about to just hand Angel over to Smith, and not just because she would go fighting, but because she belonged to him and he didn't willingly hand over what he owned. The deal he'd struck was that Smith could try to seduce her, if she was willing, but if Angel didn't want to go that far, Smith would just have to accept it and still sign the papers. All that Lucas had agreed to was to send her to him. That was the bargain. Smith had agreed, the arrogant bastard obviously thinking that his power of seduction would get her into his bed.

Lucas considered his test and what he had set up with Smith. Any other time, he would have let Angel know what he had Smith agree to, but the only way he could be sure of her loyalty was if she did what he ordered her to do. So as far as she would know when she left here, she had to seduce Smith and get him to sign the ship over to Lucas. Her success in getting the bill of sale that he had drawn up would prove her loyalty.

The sound of the bedroom door opened, and Lucas watched as she emerged, dressed for the part of seductress in a red satin dress. The dress was strapless, cut low in front, giving the viewer a teasing glimpse of the top of her breasts. The bodice was skintight, in contrast to the flared skirt that stopped just above her knees. He feasted his eyes on her, appreciating how breathtaking she looked. He let his eyes roam slowly over her, taking note of every detail. Her hair was loose around her shoulders, framing the sides of her face. His eyes came to a stop at her feet, shod in matching red high heels. He slowly let his eyes move back up to her face.

Angel stood, feeling like some kind of object as he raked his eyes over her. She hated every minute of this. Dressed as she was, she felt no better than a whore. She fought back the tears and waited for him to say something.

After what seemed like an eternity, he stood up, and still looking at her appreciatively, he walked over to her. "Darlin', Smith is gonna find it impossible to say no to you in that outfit." She gave him a stiff smile, and absently pulled at the top of the dress as she forced herself to speak.

"Well, then I shouldn't keep him waiting." She moved away from him. His voice stopped her as she reached the door.

"Hold your horses, darlin'. There's something you need to take with you." She froze and turned slowly to see him get something out of the inside pocket of his jacket. He then approached her and handed her the folded paper.

"What is it, Lucas?" she asked, although she really didn't want to know.

He smiled. "It's a bill of sale. You have to get Smith to sign the paper. It's up to you whether you get him to sign it before or after you've seduced him, just as long as you get him to sign it."

Angel swallowed a lump in her throat, trying to make her voice work through the burning in her throat. "Yes, Lucas," she said softly and then turned to leave to get away from the man who was

breaking her heart. She began to turn away but stopped, realizing that she didn't know where to go. "Lucas, you haven't told me where his quarters are," she said, forcing her voice to sound calm.

He pointed at the paper that was clutched in her hand and she raised her hand to look at it. "Oh." She took in a deep breath and again forcing a smile to her face, looked at him. Not saying another word, she turned and walked out the door as it opened. Her only thought as she left wasn't about where she was going, but that she would never forgive him for making her do this.

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Lucas stood, staring at the closed door. He wasn't pleased with Angel's behavior. Superficially, she had appeared calm and seemed prepared to do what had to be done. He sensed her mind rebelling, however, and he wondered if she would she do what he'd told her. [For your sake, darlin', you'd better,] he thought dangerously.

After a moment's thought, Lucas left the apartment. He had to get a backup plan ready, just in case Angel failed him. He estimated he had at least two hours. By then, she would have either done what was needed or not. He wondered whether he would be rewarding her for proving her loyalty to him or punishing her. He smiled slowly. It didn't really matter, he would enjoy himself either way.

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Lucas returned to the apartment a couple of hours later, his backup plan in place. He was surprised to find that Angel was still out. Maybe that sleazeball, Smith, had turned on the charm and seduced her after all. He found that this thought displeased him. He surprised himself at his dislike of the idea of her actually having sex with another man. It was all very well for her to think she had to, but to actually go through with it... He realized that his possessive streak was showing.

He stripped his jacket and shirt off and headed for the bathroom. He was thankful that the apartment had a hot water shower, even if it was completely illegal. Lucas felt grimy after a day of dealing with sleazeballs like Smith. He quickly took off the rest of his clothes and turned on the shower, enjoying the hot water that cascaded over him, enjoying it all the more in knowing that it was illegal. He just wished Angel were there to wash his back. [What that girl can do with a loofah...]

Emerging from the shower, Lucas dried himself quickly and slid into bed. Angel was going to get a nice homecoming when she arrived.

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Lucas woke with a start and checked the clock. Now he was really angry. He'd waited for hours the previous night and Angel hadn't returned. He'd finally fallen asleep, cursing her and Smith. He'd slept four hours and it was now another day, but she was still out. Lucas started to think about exactly how he was going to punish her when he heard the comm. system buzzing.

He grabbed a robe as he walked into the living area and hit the control to receive the call. A woman he didn't recognize appeared on the screen in front of him.

"I'm sorry to bother you at such an early hour, but is your name Lucas?" He nodded, trying to figure out what the hell was going on. The woman continued.

"My name is Dr. Norris and I help run the Downbelow medical clinic." For a brief, irrational moment,

Lucas thought that she was going to hit him for a donation, then she went on. "We have a woman who was brought in here, mostly unconscious, but she has brief moments of lucidity and all she says is that name, 'Lucas'. Then she slips away again. One of my other patients thought he recognized her, although it's hard to see how he could under the circumstances. Anyway, he thought he'd seen her with you and suggested I call. Could you come down and see if you know her?"

Lucas felt himself tense with rage. He clamped down hard on his anger and responded courteously to the woman, telling her that he'd get down there immediately. He cut the call short and turned towards the bedroom, wondering what had happened. If someone had hurt Angel, they'd pay, and the price would be so high they'd never forget that *no one* messed with the property of Lucas Buck.

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Lucas stood by the side of the bed on which Angel lay. The surroundings were dark and grubby, the clinic obviously desperately short of every resource. Even the cover draped over Angel's naked body was threadbare, but clean. Lucas was holding himself rigidly under control as the doctor spoke. He couldn't remember when he'd last been this angry.

"She's been badly beaten. She has two broken ribs, a cracked cheekbone, two fingers on her right hand have been dislocated and three of the toes on her right foot have been crushed. She has multiple contusions and abrasions. She should really be in the main MedLab. We don't have the facilities to treat her here."

His anger built with every word she spoke. Didn't Smith know that Angel was *his* property? Didn't he realize that Lucas would punish him for damaging that property? He had to know the full extent of that damage.

"Is there anything else?" He looked at the doctor, who seemed shocked at how calmly he had taken her catalogue of injuries. Little did she know.

"No. If you're asking whether she's been sexually assaulted, the answer is no. She must have put up a hell of a fight and got away before that could happen. There is some bruising that indicates that an attempt was made, but it was not successful."

Lucas nodded, at least thankful for that. But Smith had still tried to rape her, and he would pay for that. He would pay in a way that suited his offence.

Lucas stretched his hand to touch Angel's hair as she lay on the bed. He stopped his hand short of his usual gesture of rubbing his thumb along her cheekbone. The bruising around the broken bone on one side was severe and the other side was swollen where she'd been punched in the eye. Her face was so swollen and bruised that it was hardly recognizable. His anger climbed a notch higher. To see his beautiful Angel damaged like this was unforgivable, and the thing that was making him most angry of all was that he had sent her to this. It was his test that had led to this being done to her.

The doctor had started to move away as Lucas stood silently looking down at Angel, but she suddenly stopped and turned. "I forgot to give this to you. When she was found, she was naked and some of the marks on her would indicate that her clothes were ripped off her, but she had this in her hand. We had to pry her fingers apart to get at it, because we thought it might give us a clue as to who she was." She held out a sheet of paper.

Lucas took it and looked down at it. It was a signed bill of sale for the ship he'd wanted from Smith.

She'd passed the test and got the ship. He waited until the doctor had left the small alcove in which Angel's bed was, then he bent and kissed her forehead as gently as he could and spoke softly. "Angel, it wasn't that important. It wasn't worth this." He lifted the sheet away from her and flinched as he saw the extent of the cuts and bruises that covered her body. He dropped the sheet back over her and tucked it around her, then stooped and lifted her from the bed.

Angel moaned in pain as he moved her and he whispered softly, "I know, Love. It hurts, but I'll make it better soon. I promise." Lucas kissed her forehead again and swung out of the alcove.

The doctor tried to stop him as he carried Angel out, but he told her that he was taking her to MedLab. He then gave them a large donation and they let him go. Lucas went straight back to their apartment and laid her gently on their bed. He stripped the threadbare sheet away from her and looked again at the injuries that had been inflicted on her. [Smith is going to pay for every mark on her.]

He went to the drawer where he kept the regenerator he'd brought with them from Eriadne and started to work on her. Starting at Angel's feet, Lucas ran it over every bruise and cut, every mark on her front, then when he'd finished, he gently turned her over. He drew in a deep breath as he saw the red welts on her back. Someone had used some kind of belt or stick on her.

Lucas couldn't remember when he last felt this angry. He was both angry with Smith and angry with himself. He'd set Angel up for this by sending her out dressed like a walking invitation to rape as a test of her loyalty. This was the result.

He started using the regenerator on her back, watching the welts fade and the cuts close. Bruises disappeared under the attentions of the device, but Lucas knew that the broken bones beneath the bruises would take longer to heal. The device could accelerate the healing process, but the more severe the wound, the longer it took to heal. Based on what Angel had told him about the regenerator, he estimated that it would be the following day before her ribs, fingers and toes were healed. The doctor had splinted Angel's fingers, but told him that her ribs and toes would best heal by themselves, and to keep movement to a minimum.

When Lucas had done everything he could, he went and got a damp sponge from the bathroom and carefully sponged Angel down, cleaning away the dirt from her hands, knees, and feet. To get her knees so dirty, she must have crawled at some point. When he had finished, he looked down at her and considered as she lay on the bed. He decided that Smith's punishment could wait. Lucas kicked off his boots and climbed fully clothed onto the bed. Lifting Angel gently into his arms, he cradled her against him and waited for her to wake up.

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Angel gradually surfaced from a sleep that had been filled with pain and nightmares. Flashes of images came and went. Faces surrounded her, hands grabbed at her, fists pounded her until she didn't know which way to turn to run from the pain. She cried out the only word she could think of that might make it all go away. "Lucas!"

She became aware that arms held her gently, rocking her. A deep, soothing voice whispered to her that she was safe, that everything was all right, and that no one would hurt her any more. Angel slowly relaxed and calmed, some of the pain subsiding, but not all. As her focus improved, she realized that her hand and foot hurt badly and that her side ached. She forced her eyes open. All she could see at first were her own naked breasts as her head hung down. With a huge effort, she raised her head and looked up into Lucas' eyes--eyes that were full of warmth and sorrow, things she'd never seen there

before. She found that his arms held her against him, and that it was Lucas who was rocking her gently, Lucas who was whispering kind reassurances in her ear, Lucas who gently kissed her forehead and told her that she was safe now, that she could sleep.

Angel's eyes drooped and she let herself go, knowing that it was all a dream, that Lucas had never been that kind to her and never would be.

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When she awoke the next time, Angel was alone in their bed. It took her a few moments to focus on her surroundings and to remember where she was and what had happened. She pushed away the awful memories of the time with Smith. She never wanted to think about it again. She was home and she was safe. Then Angel realized that her hands were empty and she shrieked in despair. She had lost the bill of sale, the whole reason she had gone through such pain.

When he heard her scream, Lucas rushed into the bedroom. He slid quickly onto the bed beside her and pulled her into his arms, stroking her hair, kissing her, telling her that she was safe, and that it was over. Angel went rigid as she waited for him to ask where the bill of sale was. What could she tell him? That she'd had it but lost it? He'd never believe her. The tears started to roll down her face as she thought about how he would punish her for her failure.

She felt Lucas gently lift her head and his fingers wipe away her tears. "It's all right, Angel-Face. There's nothing to cry about. You're safe now, and those fingers and toes will soon feel better. Don't cry, darlin'. It's all over, and no one's gonna hurt you any more."

Angel decided to confess and get her punishment over with. "But Lucas, I lost the bill of sale. I'm sorry. I got him to sign it, but I lost it. Please don't hurt me. I hurt so much already." She couldn't control her sobs, although every one sent a shooting pain through her side.

She felt Lucas kiss her forehead gently and lift her chin again. "Angel, you didn't lose it. God knows how, but you hung on it through everything that happened to you. I have it, but it wasn't worth this. You didn't have to let him do this to get that damned paper." He wiped away her tears again and this time kissed her softly on the lips. Angel winced as his lips touched a sore spot where she'd been hit and her lip had split. She felt him pull away quickly.

"I'm sorry, darlin'. Did that hurt? Let me get the regenerator and we'll fix it."

Angel was utterly confused. Lucas was being so kind to her. Why wasn't he punishing her for disobeying him? She hadn't slept with Smith. In fact she'd fought him off with all of the strength she had.

She watched warily as Lucas returned, holding the regenerator. He lifted her head and ran the device gently over her mouth. Angel could feel the vibrations pulling her split lip together and healing it. When it was done, Lucas leaned forward and gently kissed her again.

He spoke softly. "You should go back to sleep. I'm going to go out for a while, but I won't be long. I've got a little job to take care of, then I'll be back. Why don't you go to sleep and when I get back I'll order us some breakfast?"

Angel nodded, too bewildered by Lucas' kind behavior to argue. He continued, "Just one thing before I go, darlin'. Was it Smith who did this to you?" He looked deeply into her eyes as he asked. She knew

that this was important.

She nodded her head and said, "Yes, Lucas"

"My favorite words. Now curl up and go to sleep and we'll have breakfast when I get back.

Angel lay on the side that didn't hurt and drifted into sleep, all the while wondering what had happened to Lucas and why he was being so kind.

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Smith slowly regained consciousness and took in his surroundings. He was in some sort of metal tank, about two meters square and a meter and a half high. The tank was empty of everything other than him and a grating in the floor. He looked down at his own naked body in surprise. How the hell had he ended up here? He moved to stand and stopped as an excruciating pain stabbed his groin. A voice spoke from above him.

"Careful there, friend. Don't want to damage anything important."

Smith looked up to see Lucas Buck leaning on the side of the tank looking down at him.

"What's going on here, Buck? What do you think you're playing at?"

Lucas grinned, "Oh, I'm not playing. This is real life; it's no game."

Smith looked down at his groin and realized that a thin, sharp wire had been wrapped around his penis and testicles. It was tight, but didn't quite cut into him. It was attached to a ring in the bottom of the tank that pressed uncomfortably into his balls. He tried to move slightly to relieve the discomfort and the wire immediately cut into the top of his penis. He felt the pain then saw a trickle of blood run down the side of his cock and he froze in place. Smith realized that any sudden movement could result in his castrating himself and there was no way he could get the wire off without wire cutters of some kind.

He looked up at Lucas, his fear showing in his eyes. "Why are you doing this? Let me out of here!" The smile had disappeared from Lucas' face.

"We had a deal, Smith. You got a chance to sleep with Angel, but only if she was willing. The deal didn't include you beating her half to death and trying to rape her. I'm gonna make damn sure you never get the chance to do that again."

Smith began to panic. That voice had been cold as death. He had no doubt that Lucas would carry out his threat. Smith's eyes darted round the enclosure in which he was secured, trying to see if there was anything that could help him escape, but he could see nothing. Just the four walls of the tank, which smelled terrible. His nose wrinkled in distaste as he noticed the smell.

Lucas spoke again. "Stinks in here, don't it? Recognize it, Smith? We're in the recycling center. These tanks are used to hold waste material until it can be processed, and this particular tank is about to come into use." He paused. "Yup, here it comes."

Smith felt a vibration carrying from the tank through the wire into his balls. A viscous brown liquid welled up through the grate in the floor of the tank, slowly lapping towards him as he sat

spread-eagled. He started to lift his feet away from the liquid but stopped immediately as the pain hit his penis again. He looked down to see a fresh spurt of blood running down it.

Lucas straightened and looked down at Smith, his face a mask. "You get to choose, Smith. You can sit there and drown in shit. Or you can get up and leave any time you like. 'Course if you do that, you'll leave a piece of yourself behind." Lucas leaned forward and peered at Smith's now-shrunken penis and balls. "But it's a very small piece. I doubt if you'll miss it. Your choice."

Smith watched as Lucas turned and left, whistling softly to himself. He didn't recognize the tune. Lucas was being obscure; 'First Cut is the Deepest' was an old song. Smith heard a door slam, and switched his attention to the slowly rising level of effluent in the tank.

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Angel woke to find that Lucas was lifting her into his arms. He was sitting with his back to the headboard of the bed, and she was leaning back against his shoulder, his left arm around her, holding her upright. She still felt weak and disoriented and her head fell back onto his shoulder. She forced her eyes open and looked up, slowly focusing on Lucas' face. He was smiling down at her and leaned forward to kiss her gently.

"Feeling better now, darlin'? Are you hungry yet?"

Angel became aware that most of the aches and pains she had felt when she last awoke had dissipated. All that was left were a dull ache in her side and her sore toes. She was also hungry, but more urgently, needed the bathroom. She struggled to sit up and pulled herself away from his chest. "I have to go to the bathroom."

Lucas helped Angel stand and held her for a moment while she gained her balance. He let her go when she pushed against him, and watched her carefully as she wobbled to the bathroom door, then pulled it closed behind her.

When she emerged, Lucas had brought a tray of food and juice through from the living area. He moved to the bathroom door to help Angel back to the bed, then helped her sit upright against the headboard. He sat next to her on the edge of the bed and poured her a glass of juice, holding it out silently until she took it from him. Her wrist trembled as she tried to carry the glass to her mouth and his hand came up to steady hers. Lucas helped her drink, then took the glass from her. He slowly fed her, waiting patiently for her to finish, helping her at every stage, never saying a word.

Angel began to feel nervous at the silence and at Lucas' careful attention. "What's the matter, Lucas? Have you fallen on your head?" The question was out before she could stop herself and she held her breath, fearing his reaction.

Her eyes widened as Lucas burst out laughing. " No, darlin'. That was you, not me." Angel watched him, totally confused and surprised. This was not the Lucas she was used to. His behavior was totally out of character. She had to find out why.

"Why are you doing this, Lucas?" asked Angel, quietly.

"Doing what, Love?" Lucas lifted a napkin and gently wiped her mouth. He stood and moved the tray off the bed, placing it on a side table, then came back to sit on the bed next to her.

"You're being nice and kind and attentive. Why?"

Lucas put his arm around Angel, pulling her toward him. He gently pulled her head down until it rested on his shoulder and he stroked her hair. "You've been hurt, Angel. And I'm sorry for that. I should have trusted you, not sent you out on a stupid test."

Angel turned her head into his shoulder, enjoying the feel of his hand softly resting on her head. "Test? What test?"

Lucas sighed. "I was suspicious, darlin'. I wasn't sure that you were still loyal to me, so I wanted to test that loyalty. The deal I made with Smith wasn't exactly like I told you. I told him that he could try and get you into his bed, but if you didn't want to, that was that. You didn't have to sleep with him to get that bill of sale, darlin'. I wouldn't make you do that."

Angel felt her stomach turn over. She felt sick. Lucas had made her think that she had to prostitute herself. How could he have done that to her? And now he seemed to think that it would make it better if he told her that he'd lied to her. She couldn't speak, but her whole body started to shake.

Lucas held her more tightly to him and kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry, Angel-Face. I never meant for this to happen to you. And don't you worry, Smith has paid the price for what he did to you."

Angel pulled back from him and looked up into his face. "What did you do, Lucas? What price?" As much as she'd hated Smith and what he'd done, she didn't want his death on her conscience.

"Never you mind, darlin'. Let's just say that the punishment fit the crime." Lucas brought his hand up to her chin and lifted it, moving to kiss her mouth gently. He pulled back and looked deep into Angel's eyes, then moved forward and kissed her again, this time lingering, touching his tongue to her lips, gently forcing them open to allow him entry. His hand slowly slid from her chin, stroking her neck and finding its way to her breast, he began to massage her nipple.

Angel felt herself melting under his touch and kiss, but as she leaned back under the pressure of his kiss, a sharp pain in her ribs reminded her of what he'd done to her. She closed her mouth tight and pulled her head away. "No. Please, Lucas. No. I can't..."

She looked at Lucas fearfully, expecting him to be angry, wondering whether he'd push her as he'd done before. While he'd never actually forced her, there had been times when he had carried on arousing her whether she wanted it or not, until she eventually she *did* want it and gave in to his demands. Angel was surprised when he backed off immediately.

"I'm sorry, Angel. It's too soon, I know. I'm just glad to have you back safe." Lucas moved his hand away from her breast and pulled the sheet back up to cover her. He gently lifted her from his shoulder and laid her down on the pillow as he stood up. Gazing down at her as she lay in bed, he leaned down and kissed her forehead.

"Try to sleep some more, Love. You'll feel better soon."

Angel curled up and watched Lucas as he left the bedroom, wondering at the change in him, knowing that it wouldn't last, but unable to stop herself hoping that it would. Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at the door that he'd pulled to as he left, but had not quite closed.

She drifted into sleep but was soon roused by pressure on her bladder. The juice she'd drunk at

breakfast had taken effect. Angel pulled herself out of bed and walked to the bathroom, a lot steadier on her feet than the last time she'd tried to walk. When she came out of the bathroom, she passed close to the door to the living room and heard Lucas' voice. She couldn't hear everything he was saying but some of his words were recognizable.

"Ship... Eriadne... pilot..." She moved closer to the door and heard the next sentence in full.

"OK. I'll meet you in half an hour at the Dark Star."

Angel heard Lucas move across the living area, so she quickly ran to the bed and got in, pulling the sheet over her. Lucas opened the door to the bedroom and came through. He saw that she was awake and came to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Are you still awake, darlin'? Will you be OK if I go out for a while?" Angel couldn't believe that Lucas was asking her that question. He'd never bothered about her feelings when he'd left her alone before.

"I'll be fine, Lucas. I'm getting sleepy again. Maybe I'll nap for a bit."

"That's my girl." Lucas leaned over and kissed her gently on the cheek, then stood and left the room, this time pulling the door completely shut behind him. Angel leaped out of bed and ran to the wardrobe. She pulled a dress over her head and grabbed a pair of flat shoes, then quickly ran to the bedroom door. Listening carefully, she could hear nothing, so silently pushed the door open. The living area was empty; Lucas had left. Angel followed.

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Angel watched from the doorway of the Dark Star as Lucas met with a large, sinister-looking Drazi, who she guessed to be the pilot he'd arranged to meet. She stood nervously, ready to duck behind the door should Lucas suddenly look in her direction. But he didn't, and Angel waited for them to sit in a booth before she moved inside.

Using the darkness of the club and the dancers on the stage as cover, she carefully moved around the Dark Star; she needed to hear what Lucas and the Drazi were saying. Keeping her eyes alert, she made her way to an empty booth beside the one where they sat. As she approached, her heart almost stopped as Lucas looked in her direction. She froze, ready for flight, but noticed that it wasn't her he was looking at, but the exotic dancers. If she weren't so grateful for their distraction, she would have been jealous at the appreciative way he was looking at the women as they swayed and gyrated to the music. Instead she used the opportunity to get herself into the booth without being caught. Sliding across, she sat with her back to him. Thankful that his back was to her as well, she turned her head slightly so that she could hear better above the noise of the club.

She heard the Drazi saying something about getting a drink and she turned her head a little more until she could see him get up and go over to the bar. Lucas shifted in his seat, and Angel turned her head away sharply, her heart racing in fear, praying that he didn't turn around and recognize her. Despite his recent gentleness, she suspected that he wouldn't be very happy if he found her following him. She sat dead still, holding her breath, anticipating a deep drawl asking her what the hell she was doing there. But nothing. She risked a glance, letting out the breath she was holding, when she found he still had his back to her.

"Can I get you a drink?" Angel almost jumped out of her skin at the voice beside her. She looked up to find a waitress looking at her expectantly. Angel shook her head, willing the woman to go away, not

wanting to draw Lucas' attention to her booth. The waitress didn't look too pleased.

"There's a two drink minimum; you can't sit here if you're not drinking." Angel felt herself beginning to panic. [Calm down, Angel. Just order something.] She forced a smile and pointed at a drink that the waitress had on her tray.

"Vodka?" asked the waitress, her tone telling Angel that she was fully aware of her strange behavior. She didn't care; she didn't want to speak in case Lucas heard her. She nodded and watched the waitress walk off to get her drink. A minute later the waitress returned with her drink and placed it down on the table. Angel reached into the pocket of her dress and removed a credit and handed it to the waitress, who gave her an odd smile and then walked away. She watched her leave with relief. Ignoring the drink, she turned her attention back to the booth behind her.

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Lucas sat tapping his fingers on the table, waiting impatiently for the Drazi to return. While he waited, he watched the dancers on the stage. He watched with appreciation, but couldn't help thinking that Angel would put the woman on stage to shame. He smiled at the memory of her seductive dance, but quickly stopped. Her dance was what had led to his testing her loyalty, and as a result, she had been beaten and almost raped. He felt the rage building up again. He wasn't one to admit guilt easily, but it had been his fault.

He let out a heavy sigh, then started to smile. He planned to make it up to her when he got back to the apartment. He was busy thinking about just how he would do that, when the Drazi returned with a drink in hand. Lucas pushed aside his thoughts. They would have to wait; right now he had work to do.

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Angel sat staring at the drink in front of her, her mind in a riot of emotions. Never in her life had she been this angry, scared, hurt, and horrified at the same time. She was finding it hard to breathe and was so lost in thought that the noise and activity around her seemed non-existent.

If she hadn't heard Lucas' plans with her own ears, she wouldn't have been able to believe it. But she had heard, and now she felt as if she was standing on the edge of a cliff, with the overwhelming feelings threatening to send her over.

Letting out a shuddering breath, Angel let herself think about what she had overheard. At first she had been happy as Lucas told the Drazi that he wanted to hire him to pilot his ship to Eriadne. That news had thrilled her. The thought of going home made her heart sing with joy, but then she'd listened with mounting horror and jealousy as he explained to the rather suspicious Drazi why he wanted to go to a planet inhabited only by a small group of Brakiri.

Angel listened as Lucas explained that Eriadne was the home of the mother of his soon-to-be-born son, and that he wanted to be reunited with her so that the three of them could be a family.

Angel let out a strangled sound at the pain she still felt at what Lucas had told the Drazi. She knew that he was talking about Demon, and it hurt more than anything to think that he wanted Demon and that he believed her son to be his. Even worse was how he'd said that he wanted the three of them to be a family. [Where does that leave me?] wondered Angel painfully. She felt the jealousy build up, but then she suddenly calmed as rational thought crept in.

[Oh my god,] thought Angel as she began to realize what he was really planning. Suddenly her jealousy didn't matter. Lucas may have told the pilot that he wanted Demon, but she knew that Demon hated him. Demon loved Gideon and the son she was carrying was his. Angel started to realize with mounting horror that for Lucas to get Demon, he'd have to take her by force. [My God, he's going to kidnap her!]

Another realization hit Angel hard. Lucas was only returning to Eriadne long enough to kidnap Demon. She felt the tears well up. He'd never intended to return to Eriadne to live. He'd lied and misled her all along. He'd sent her to Smith to get the ship not because he wanted to go to Eriadne to make a life together with her, but to kidnap her sister.

The thought made Angel feel sick and angry. She'd been beaten and almost raped for a lie. [Damn you, Lucas!] She looked down at the drink on the table. She didn't really like alcohol, but right now she wanted a drink more than anything. With shaking hands, she picked up the glass and downed it. Grimacing as the warm bitter liquid slid down her throat, she then enjoyed the feeling as it seemed to infuse her with warmth that drove the cold empty feeling from her stomach.

She saw the waitress and raised her hand to get her attention. When the waitress reached her booth she picked up the glass. "Can I get you another drink?" Angel nodded.

"Single or double?" queried the waitress.

"To save you having to come back over and over, why don't you just bring me the bottle?" she said dryly. When the waitress remained standing, giving her another odd look, Angel felt her irritation level rise and she couldn't stop herself from snapping. "You did hear me, didn't you?"

The waitress nodded and hurried off, returning minutes later with a full bottle of vodka and a clean glass. The waitress waited for her to pay and then walked away to take an order at the next table. Angel watched her for a moment, then turned her attention to the bottle in front of her. She picked it up and poured a healthy shot into the glass. Angel picked up the glass and looked at it, deciding whether or not she should drink it. "Why the hell not," muttered Angel as she raised it to her mouth and downed the warm, clear liquid.

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## The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

[Part 1: Past](#) {[Part 2: Present](#)} {[Part 3: Present Perfect](#)} {[Part 4: Future](#)} {[Part 5: Conditional](#)}