

The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes - Part 1: The Gathering

by [The Space Witches](#)



Something Wicked...

Chapter 3

Gideon walked down the corridor away from his wife's old rooms, trying to work out what was happening. It was obvious that someone wanted something from him or from one of his family, but who and what? How had their enemies known that the Gideon family was on their way to Eriadne? It wasn't exactly front page news. Since Deborah's retirement from the public eye there had been little media interest in the Gideons. They had been pretty much left to get on with their lives. So who had found out that they were leaving Earth, and who had taken the time to set up this elaborate trap?

Trap it certainly was, and Gideon cursed himself for falling victim to it so easily. He wondered whether his instincts for danger had eroded during the years since his retirement. Would he have been such easy prey when he was still in active service? Perhaps he was no longer the man he'd been then; perhaps he wasn't the right man for the job Sheridan wanted done after all.

Gideon gave a snort of self-contempt and pushed all his doubts to one side. He didn't have time for them. It was time to start planning how to turn the tables on his captors. To do that, he needed to push aside all his fears for his family, too. That was easier said than done. A part of him continued to worry about what was happening to Deborah, Marcus and Mattie.

An occasional nudge in the back from the gun carried by his guard was sufficient to direct Gideon and to remind him not to try anything just yet. As they descended into the lower levels of the castle, he couldn't help being reminded of his first visit to Eriadne. Angel had imprisoned him in one of these rooms, and Deborah had rescued him. Pushing aside the mixture of pleasant and painful memories evoked by the location, Gideon concentrated on memorizing the route being taken by his captors.

He eventually found himself in the cell block where his crew had been confined during their first visit to the castle, and where Angel had been held on her return with Lucas, before Nikarran had taken her away. They finally stopped at a heavy door, which the guard gestured for him to open. Gideon pulled the door aside, and was then shoved hard from behind. He stumbled forward, and before he could recover, the door was slammed shut. Turning quickly, Gideon stared hard at the door, which looked remarkably solid.

"Aw hell."

Demon sat on the couch, trying to make contact with Angel, but failing. At this distance, she needed Angel to make the effort from the other end, too, to have any chance of success. She had also tried to send to John, knowing that it would be almost impossible for her to link to the telepath, but she was desperate for news about what was happening to the others. All her attempts had failed.

Looking down at her daughter, who laid nestling in her arms, Demon smiled. Mattie had cried herself into exhaustion after her father had left and was now asleep, sucking her thumb. Stroking the little girl's hair, Demon couldn't help thinking about Mattie's father. Saying goodbye to Matthew, letting him go without making a scene, appearing bold and confident, had all been difficult. Demon had wanted to cling to her husband, begging him not to leave her, pleading with Sol not to take him away, but she'd known that would just have made everything more difficult. So yet again, Demon had pretended to be strong, pretended that she didn't feel as if half her life were being taken from her when Matthew had walked out of the room.

The door opened suddenly and Lily was pushed into the room, almost stumbling over the hem of her long, green velvet dress. "Hey!" The little redhead span on her heel and glared up at Harry, who towered nearly half a meter over her head. "Keep your hands to yourself! I'm quite capable of walking on my own. I don't need *your* assistance."

Demon wouldn't have believed that someone of Harry's height and bulk could cower in front of a woman as tiny as Lily, but cower he did. She decided he wasn't so dumb after all. Lily could be very scary when her temper was roused, as it was then.

Harry backed out of the room quickly, slamming the door shut behind him, and the two women both heard the sound of the key turning in the lock. Demon laid Mattie carefully on the sofa, and stood as Lily rushed across the room toward her. The sisters hugged each other for a long moment, then Demon pressed her fingers to her lips in a warning gesture. She looked down at Mattie, then waved her sister to join her sitting on the opposite sofa.

[[So they caught you off guard, too?]] Demon sent to her sister, continuing to hold her hand so they could send to each other, something they could only do while touching.

Lily sighed. *[[You could call it that. We were in right in the middle... well, coitus interruptus hardly covers it!]]*

Demon fought to conceal a smile, while at the same time feeling some relief that she and Matthew

hadn't been caught out in the same way. The guards had obviously been sent to their rooms first.

Lily went on, *[[And of course, because I was naked when they burst in, I didn't have a chance to get to any of my daggers, so I couldn't do anything. They took John and Luke away then frog-marched me here. I suppose I should be grateful they let us dress first. I doubt if there'd be anything in your rooms that would fit me.]]*

Knowing her sister's banter concealed her fears, Demon asked quickly, *[[Did you make contact with the children? I linked to Marcus briefly and he said they're being brought back to the castle by the people who captured them. I'm hoping they're on their way here. I've been trying to get through to John and Angel, but no luck so far.]]*

The sisters agreed quickly that Lily would link to her children and track their progress through the castle while Demon continued in her attempt to contact Angel. A few seconds later, Demon's link to her sister came alive and she was able to get out a quick warning. Angel's response left Demon in a state of total panic.

"Lucas." Angel's whisper was breathless with fear.

"Hello, Angel-face," drawled Lucas, as he reached out a hand, intent on caressing her face.

Her instinct for survival took over, and Angel swatted his hand away, yelling, "No!" She pushed past Lucas and headed toward the doors, intent on escape. As she reached the library doors, two large, thuggish looking men appeared, blocking her way. Focusing on the two men, Angel tried to use her telekinesis to knock them out of her path. Nothing happened. Angel came to a dead halt, panic stricken as she realized it wasn't her fear hampering her ability. It was Lucas.

Spinning around, she found Lucas standing where she had left him, his arms folded and his eyebrows quirked in amusement. *[Bastard,]* thought Angel, as she searched for another means of escape. Spotting the spiral staircase that led to the first floor, Angel ran toward it. Lucas made no attempt to stop her as she ran past him and up the stairs.

Reaching the landing, Angel dashed toward the door on the first floor. Before she could reach it, another heavy set, muscle-bound man appeared. Without her telekinesis, she knew she was no match for him. Angel stopped short, her breathing ragged and heart racing. She was trapped.

Turning, she watched Lucas begin to make his way up the stairs. Desperately, Angel tried to find an alternative means of escape. Then she thought she might have found it--her sisters. It was a long shot. Ever since the Vorlon inside Demon had gone to sleep, linking with each other was difficult, unless they were physically close, and since they broke their connection when leaving Excalibur, neither Angel nor Demon had been able to link to Lily unless in physical contact. Angel could only hope that Demon was near enough within the castle for a link to be established. Ignoring the fact that Lucas had nearly reached the top of the stairs, Angel called to her sister with her mind.

[[Demon? Can you hear me?]] Angel waited for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, she heard Demon's voice, albeit faintly.

[[Angel! Thank heavens! If you can get out of the castle, do it now. Strange men have taken Lily, the children and me captive, and they've taken Matthew, John, and Luke away somewhere. I can't reach John and we don't know what's going on. Please, get out now before they catch you.]]

Angel's stomach turned. Demon sounded afraid and that wasn't something that happened often or

easily. Angel knew who was at the root of the trouble her sisters found themselves in.

[[Oh god, Demon. It's Lucas!]]

Angel tensed as she saw Lucas arrive at the top of the staircase. She focused back on Demon, expecting a response. None came, and Angel silently yelled for her sister. *[[Demon? Are you still there? Please answer me!]]*

"I'm sorry to cut your conversation short, love, but I can't have you linking with your sisters just now," explained Lucas, as he stopped in front of her.

Just as before, Lucas had blocked Angel's mental link to her sisters.

"Oh God, Lily! Oh God he's back he's come back and Matthew will try to kill him and he'll kill Matthew I know he will oh god..." Demon's thoughts descended into chaos. She couldn't think straight, she couldn't reason, she could do nothing but remember the deal Lucas had offered her five years before.

The choice had been simple. She could give him her son--[Never! He's not Lucas' son. He's Matthew's and he's mine!]-she could bear him another child, which was no longer possible, or she could give him her sister. Demon knew exactly why Lucas was here now. He'd come to collect. Her time had run out.

"Demon! Pull yourself together!" Lily's tiny hands grasped Demon's arms as she tried to shake the tall blonde, who sat rigid with fear on the sofa. Demon managed to stop mumbling her fears, but she couldn't stop shaking as Lily pulled her into her arms and hugged her big sister.

"Now, tell me what's wrong." Lily's face was stern and her voice commanding, as she pushed Demon out to arms length and frowned at her.

Demon took a deep breath, and broke her five year long silence. She told Lily for the first time what had happened at the masquerade ball on Ceti Gamma III, and let her know what Angel had just sent. All the color drained from Lily's face as Demon spoke.

Before the little redhead could respond, the door burst open and the children were shoved into the room. Demon pulled herself together and somehow pushed all her fears aside. Now wasn't the time. Now they had to think of the children.

Angel's head snapped back. Just as before, Lucas had cut her off, not only from her power, but also from her sister. Anger mixed with fear made Angel brave. "You son-of-a-bitch," she spat.

"Anyone would think you weren't happy to see me," responded Lucas, stepping closer to her.

Instead of shrinking away, Angel stood her ground and looked up at him defiantly. "You don't say? And I wonder why I'm not happy to see the man who's made my life a living hell?" she asked, sarcastically. The instant the words were out, she regretted her foolhardy attempt at bravery. Lucas' expression changed, and she felt like a very small rabbit about to be pounced on by a hungry, dangerous predator.

He smiled dangerously, saying softly, "Those are just words, darlin'. That's not how you *really* feel about me."

Angel felt like slapping the smug bastard. "I hate you, Lucas Buck. That's the only emotion I feel for

you." When he laughed softly, Angel raised her hand to hit him. Lucas' hand fastened around her wrist, restraining her arm before she could reach his face. She yelped in surprise as he pulled her against him suddenly, his free arm coming around her waist, holding her tightly. Before she could struggle to break free, his mouth fell upon hers.

The kiss was bruising and possessive. Angel tried to keep her jaw locked and her mouth closed, but Lucas twisted her arm behind her back, causing her to gasp in discomfort. As her mouth opened, Lucas' tongue plunged inside. Angel's mind whirled in chaos. Her brain was telling her to fight him, to bite his tongue off, anything to make him stop. But her heart and her body's need were overpowering and betraying her. It had been so long since she'd been fucked by Lucas. He was like a drug to which she was addicted. One small taste of him and she craved more, but like a drug, she knew her addiction to him would destroy her if she succumbed.

She was mortified and angry with herself when she couldn't stop herself from responding and letting Lucas deepen the kiss. The taste of him was intoxicating. The heat from his body was like a siren's call, luring her body to his. Angel found herself moaning against his mouth and pressing her body closer against him.

Finally, Lucas broke away. He let go of her arm and lifted both hands to cup her face. His thumbs caressed her cheeks as he smiled at her. "You'll never be able to deny your love for me. You can say you hate me, but your body will always tell the truth."

Lucas' self-satisfied confidence snapped some sense back into Angel, and she wrenched herself away from his hands. "Maybe that's true, but I'll fight those feelings before I let you use them to destroy me!"

Lucas sighed, "I don't want to destroy you, Angel-face."

If Angel didn't know better, she could have sworn he was being sincere. But she did know better. Lucas didn't have a sincere bone in his body. He wanted something. "What do you want, Lucas?"

"You," he answered.

Angel sighed and shook her head, "The truth, Lucas! What are you doing here? Why have your thugs taken my sisters and their children captive? And where are Matthew, Luke and John? Have you finally decided to take your revenge on me for betraying you?"

"I'm telling you the truth. I've had your sisters secured in Demon's quarters. Their men have been taken to the cell block for their own safety. I don't want anyone interfering with my plans—which don't involve taking revenge on you," answered Lucas.

Before Angel could say anything else, Lucas continued, "Now as much as I'd love to continue talking with you, Angel-face, I have to be a good host and go see to my other guests."

Angel didn't like the sound of that. "Lucas, if you harm them, I swear..."

Lucas cut her off before she could voice her threat. "Don't swear, love. It ain't ladylike. As long as no one gets in my way, no one will get hurt. Now, be a good girl and go off with Bubba here. I have to go and say my hellos to your family." Lucas looked over at Bubba. "Take her to my quarters and secure her there," he said to the muscle-bound henchman, who had moved up behind Angel.

Angel jerked away from Bubba. "I'm not going anywhere! I don't believe you! You want something, Lucas Buck. I don't trust you not to hurt my family. I want answers, Lucas, and I want them now!" she demanded.

"And you'll get them, love. But later." Lucas nodded to Bubba and Angel felt a strong hand close around her upper arm. She tried to pull free, but although the hand wasn't grasping her hard, Bubba wasn't going to let go. Lucas closed the gap between them and claimed her mouth in a brief kiss.

When he pulled back, Angel glared at him. Lucas just grinned in response before ordering Bubba to take her away. As Bubba half-led and half-dragged Angel away, Lucas called after her, "Don't worry, I won't be long, then we can get...reacquainted."

"Go to hell, you bastard," shot Angel over her shoulder, as Bubba led her out of the library.

Bubba escorted Angel into Lucas' quarters then left, locking the door behind him. For a while, Angel stared at the door, questions buzzing in her head. How long had Lucas been on Eriadne? How had he known they were returning? What did he want? What was he going to do with her? Was her family safe? Lucas was back in her life and that could only mean trouble. Angel couldn't let anything bad happen to her family. She had scraped and clawed her way back up from the depths of despair in which Lucas had left her and she wasn't about to let him mess up her life again.

[Damn you to hell, Lucas!] Even though she knew the door was locked, she reached for the doorknob and twisted, then pulled on it, but the door didn't budge. Angel chewed at her lower lip, and then shouted through the door. She suspected that as a precaution, Lucas had told Bubba to stand guard outside the door.

"Hey, you! If you're out there, I suggest you let me out!" ordered Angel. When there was no response, she hammered her fist on the door and shouted again, "Dammit, let me out! Can you hear me? Open this damned door!"

Silence.

Angel pressed her face close to the door and listened. She heard a faint noise as Bubba shifted his feet. "Tell me something, did Lucas tell you I'm a witch?" asked Angel.

After more silence, she finally heard Bubba's muffled answer, "No."

"Didn't he? Well," Angel paused and then pounded on the door again, hoping to startle the man on the other side, before she continued, "If you don't let me out, you big, oversized, jackass, I'm going to turn you into a very ugly, slimy, bug-eyed toad. Which I will then capture, chop up and feed to the birds!" It was a lame threat, and Angel knew it, but she hoped that Bubba was a dimwit, who believed in scary stories about witches.

Again, there was nothing but silence from the other side of the door, and Angel mentally kicked herself for trying to scare a grown man with a fairy tale that would have made her nephews and nieces laugh. She rested her forehead against the door. She was isolated from her family and she didn't know what Lucas was up to. It took all the control she had not to cry.

"You wouldn't really turn me into a toad, would you?" came the soft, muffled voice.

Angel lifted her head, opened her eyes and admitted wearily, "No, I wouldn't." It was the truth. The only time she had conjured a toad, it had been an accident. She didn't have a clue how to do it intentionally. And besides that, if she did turn Bubba into a toad, he wouldn't be able to open the door for her

"I'm sorry, I have to keep you locked up," said Bubba, regretfully.

"You don't," said Angel, her hopes picking up. "Just open the door and let me out. We can make it look like I tricked you into coming inside, and then I whacked you over the head with something, before escaping. Lucas would never have to know. Please, help me!" pleaded Angel.

"He would know. The Boss knows everything. If I help you escape, he'll kill me."

Angel's hopes sank. She could hear the fear in the man's voice. He was right. Lucas would know, and he would punish Bubba for his betrayal. Even though Bubba was helping Lucas keep her prisoner, Angel didn't want his death on her hands.

"I'm sorry," said Bubba.

Sighing, Angel backed away from the door without a word. She turned and surveyed the room, refusing to fall apart. She had to keep a level head and find another way out. Once she did that, she would try to free her family, so they could escape from Eriadne before Lucas did them any harm.

"Stop!"

Lily took a deep breath as quiet descended on Demon's living room. The moment the door had closed behind the thugs who had brought them there, the four children had started shooting question after question at their mothers, without giving them so much as a second to reply.

"We were brave! We didn't get scared, Mum." "Who are those nasty men?" "Is Dad here?" *[[Ma, where are Dad and Aboji?]]* "They didn't find out we were 'pathing through Dasha." "Because Nima distracted them." "Nasty men!" "Why did they bring us here?" "I don't like 'em. They don't feel good." *[[What do they want?]]*

Lily decided her nerves were already frayed enough by the news they'd just got from Angel, and she put a quick end to the pandemonium with her command. She didn't often raise her voice, so the effect was all the greater when she did. Unfortunately, an unintended side effect was that Mattie awoke and started whimpering. Demon quickly moved to the other sofa to lift her daughter into her arms, making soothing noises.

Lily gave Demon an apologetic look before smiling at the children, to take the sting out of her command. She could see that despite their assurances about not being afraid, all of them were agitated, and they didn't know what to make of the situation. *[I wish I did,]* Lily thought, but she pushed her fears and doubts aside. They would have to wait until later. For now, they'd have to find a way to calm down the children, and to explain everything to them without frightening them.

"Now, if you would just sit down," she patted the seat of the sofa next to her, "and be quiet for a bit, we could try to explain things to you. All right?"

Four heads nodded, and as the children scrambled onto the sofas next to their mothers, Lily discreetly moved her arm around Faylinn, so her hand touched Demon's elbow on the armrest of the second sofa. *[[What can we tell them, without lying outright?]]*

[[Leave it to me,]] Demon sent, then looked from Marcus, sitting next to her, to Lily's three children. "I know those men were rather rude, but they wanted to make sure that you lot didn't run wild around the castle. They work for... an old acquaintance of ours, but he doesn't want anything bad to happen to you."

Demon briefly smiled at Marcus, and Lily had to suppress a shudder. It was all too true--as long as

Lucas thought Marcus was his heir, he'd never let anything happen to the boy. The other children might not be so safe. The redhead concentrated on Demon's voice again as she continued.

"This man has urgent business he wants to discuss with us, and when he found out we would be here, he came here, too. Your father agreed to talk to him, Marcus, which is why he isn't here."

"And our Dad and Aboji?" Faylinn asked, giving her mother a questioning look.

"Dad and Aboji were asked to join Uncle Matthew." Lily smiled gently, although something was bugging her, something that was just out of her reach. Feeling her fears threatening to rise inside her, Lily suppressed her emotions immediately. She was well aware that her telepathic son and Marcus, with his empathic abilities, would pick up on any intense feeling from her, even if they tried to block. For once, Lily wished she had her sister's iron control over her emotions, though at the same time she was aware that beneath that calm surface, Demon was even more afraid than she was. [We can't afford to panic, if we want to stand a chance against Lucas Buck,] she told herself firmly.

"And Auntie Angel? Is she also with this ack...ack...this man?" Marcus asked with a frown.

"She could be in her room, or maybe she's in the library. It was always one of her favorite places."

Marcus and Lily's three children seemed to digest this, while Mattie sat on Demon's lap, thumb in mouth, looking from one to the other intently, as if she could sense the seriousness of the situation.

"All questions answered?" Lily asked after a moment of silence, hoping that their explanation was enough to assuage the children's fears.

They all nodded, and Marcus turned to look up at his mother. "Can we go explore again?"

Demon shook her head. "You should probably stay here for now. Didn't you want to show your new toys to your cousins?"

Marcus nodded, though he clearly wasn't overly enthusiastic about having to stay inside, when there was a whole castle waiting to be explored.

"All right then. Your bag and the toy box are over there." Demon pointed to where their baggage was still standing near the door.

Lily couldn't suppress a smile when she followed Demon and the children across the room. Just like her own three, Marcus had insisted that he bring his own bag, which he had packed with his toothbrush, pajamas, and Half-Ted. The teddy bear--now completely earless--still came first in Marcus' affections before all his other toys, which had been packed into a box and not taken out once during the trip so far.

When Marcus' bag and the box of toys had been singled out, as well as Mattie's favorite toy soldiers, Demon suggested the children go play in her bedroom. The reaction was predictable: protests from Faylinn and Marcus, with Dasha trying to calm them down, and Naima and Mattie looking on, round-eyed with curiosity.

Lily shared a long-suffering look with Demon, then hunched down, and after she'd succeeded in shushing them, she explained, "Demon and I have to discuss something, and we need some peace and quiet for that. I'm sure you can play just as nicely in the bedroom as you could here. And I bet Auntie Demon doesn't mind you bouncing on her bed, if you take off your shoes first and you're careful that no one hurts themselves. The beds here have a really good bounce, don't they, Demon?" She smiled innocently at her sister.

The tall blonde gave her a 'You'll-pay-for-that-later' look, before smiling at the children, who had cheered up at that prospect. "As long as you're careful, especially when Mattie is on the bed. She isn't as steady on her feet as the rest of you. Two of you always have to hold her hands. Understood?"

Lily winced as loud cheering broke out, and the whole pack of rascals ran into Demon's bedroom, the two boys carrying Marcus' toy box, and Mattie with her shorter legs trailing behind.

"Close the door, please," Lily called after them, raising her voice above the noise, and the door slammed shut barely a second after everyone had disappeared inside the bedroom.

A moment later it was opened, revealing a sheepishly smiling Marcus. "Sorry." He quickly closed the door again, this time silently.

Lily rose and smiled at Demon. "Well, your son certainly inherited your good manners."

Demon snorted, grinning as she replied. "Don't let his angelic looks fool you. There's a little demon hidden beneath." She quickly became serious. "But there's a big devil that needs our attention now. We've got to find a way to get out, or to get help."

Lily sighed and nodded, and they settled down on the sofa again, to plot against Lucas Buck.

Angel searched high and low, but as far she could tell, the place was locked up tighter than Fort Knox. Her hand still tingled from trying to open one of the windows. Lucas must have discovered the castle's internal security system, and activated a force field around the perimeter. It had given her a nasty shock. Angel had called Lucas every foul name under the sun as she'd nursed her hand, and she'd given up on the windows. Of course, it would have been tricky even if she'd been able to get one open, as Lucas had chosen quarters on the third floor.

With escape by that route eliminated, Angel started to look for secret passages. She knew there were concealed tunnels and entrances scattered throughout the castle. Somehow, Lucas must have known about them, too, which didn't surprise Angel one little bit. He appeared to have chosen quarters without any access to hidden passageways. Angel continued searching, nearly tearing the living room apart as she tried to find less obvious ways out. She pulled a bookshelf away from the wall, and let it fall to the ground with a crash, its contents spilling over the floor, in the hopes that an air vent was hidden behind it. Of course there wasn't.

Giving up on the living room, Angel moved into Lucas' bedroom. Her stomach fluttered nervously as she saw the large, wooden four-poster bed in the center of the room. [Don't even go there!] Angel told herself, forcing herself to look around. A dark oak cupboard, bookshelves, and a chest of drawers filled the rest of the room. A stuffed crow, perched on a stand, stood in one corner. Its eyes seemed to follow Angel as she searched. Eventually, it got too much for her, and she walked up to the bird and knocked it off its perch, before kicking it under the bed. Then she continued searching, becoming more desperate, frustrated and afraid as it became obvious that Lucas had chosen quarters from which even Houdini wouldn't have been able to escape.

Finally conceding defeat, Angel moved back into the living room. She sat on the sofa and buried her face in shaking hands. She told herself to remain calm. Losing control wasn't going to help, but the realization that she wasn't able to get out terrified her. She knew Lucas would return, and she was scared. Just what was going to happen when he finally came for her?

Angel dropped her hands and sat back. She'd survive whatever was going to happen, as long as Lucas didn't harm her family. Breathing slowly, Angel tried to get a grip on her rapidly growing fears. She

knew all she could do for the moment, was to wait for Lucas to come for her.

Mattie was gurgling with laughter, enjoying being the center of attention, as her brother and cousins took it in turns to hold her hands. They pulled her up whenever they bounced on the mattress together, so she would fly higher than she could on her own. Flynn and Nima had just taken over from the boys, who sat down at the foot of the big bed, watching.

After a moment, Dasha felt someone nudge his mind. *[[What is it, Marco?]]* he asked, using his cousin's old nickname, a habit that had developed when Flynn and he were too little to pronounce Marcus' name properly. He gave Marco a sideways glance, curious about what his cousin had to say or ask that he didn't want the girls to hear.

[[Did you feel it?]] Embarrassment colored his cousin's question, and before Dasha could reply, Marco hurried on, *[[I didn't snoop, but it was just...well...Suddenly I felt her for a moment...]]*

"What are you 'pathing about?" Flynn's voice suddenly intruded.

Both boys looked up at the three girls. They had stopped bouncing, which both Marco and Dasha had missed somehow, and now plopped down on the mattress in front of them. Even Mattie was so out of breath that she didn't protest the break. Nima started tickling the toddler's tummy, making her giggle.

"What do you mean?" Marco asked defensively, giving Flynn a dark look.

Dasha knew it was useless--his twin sister always knew when they were up to something, and she wouldn't let go until she found out what it was. Dasha didn't understand why his cousin always tried to shut her out, anyway, but they were both stubborn, so all he could do was try to make peace between the two when they started fighting.

Flynn giggled. "I know you, Marcus Gideon, you can't fool me. And I always know when Dasha 'paths. I can feel it." She lifted her right hand and tapped her temple with her index finger.

"But you're not a telepath!"

"Nope. Ma says it's proolly 'cos we're twins."

Marco grumbled and gave Dasha a rebellious look.

The young telepath shrugged. *[[Better tell her.]]*

Marco sighed, defeated, then said, "Your Ma...When she and my Mum were talking to us... I felt she was scared."

Flynn leaned forward, eyes flashing. "Ma isn't a scaredy-cat!"

Before Marco could reply and make Flynn even more angry, Dasha inserted, "I felt it, too!"

Flynn and Nima both gave him a wide-eyed look and he hurried on to assure them that he hadn't been snooping. "It was strong. Just for a moment, like it suddenly came up and surprised her, then she stopped it, or hid it away."

"xackly." Marco nodded, his blond curls shaking. He frowned. "Something's odd. My Mum never lies, but..."

"Maybe she didn't tell us everything," Flynn finished the sentence. "But why?"

"The grownups always try to stop us being afraid." Dasha could still remember vividly when their mother had been sleeping so long, shortly before Uncle Matt had left the Excalibur with Auntie Demon and Marco. Dad and Aboji had told them that their Ma had been working very, very hard down on the planet, and she needed to sleep for a long time. But even though Dasha had been blocking like Aboji had showed him, he had known from the way the nurses and everyone acted around him, Flynn and Nima, that something was wrong with their Ma.

Nima's voice brought Dasha back from his dark thoughts, as she spoke up for the first time. "What can we do?"

Mattie's giggling was the only sound in the room, as the older four children looked at each other, clueless.

"I don't like it, but there doesn't really seem to be any other way," Demon said, her face clearly expressing her discomfort. She and Lily had been discussing various possibilities of escape, but they had been forced to discard all the alternatives. Lucas wasn't so stupid as to leave them unguarded, so the door was out, and there were no other doors-obvious or hidden-leading out of Demon's quarters. No doubt Lucas had taken that into account.

The comm. unit in Demon's room, which Matthew had had installed at the end of the Excalibur's first visit to Eriadne, had been reprogrammed, and the sisters hadn't been able to work out the password. While Lily enjoyed playing with computers, she had never done anything like hacking a password. That was John's area of expertise, but as far as they knew, he was imprisoned somewhere with Luke and Matthew.

For a moment, Lily wondered if the men were being kept down in the dungeons, or in the cell block, where they had confined the Excalibur crew on that first visit. She remembered how she and Ilas had locked away John and Max down in the cellars, after capturing them on their reconnaissance tour to the camouflaged castle. The sisters hadn't had anything in mind beyond having a little fun while finding out what these strangers were doing on Eriadne. Little had they known that the arrival of the Excalibur's crew would change their lives forever. But it had also set in motion certain events that had now caught up with them.

Pushing back her memories to concentrate on the current problem, Lily smiled gently at Demon as she squeezed her elder sister's hand. "I'm afraid we don't have any choice. Don't worry. I can do all the bits you don't like..." She trailed off, not wanting to dwell on Demon's fears. Then she rose and crossed the room to stand in front of the French windows leading out onto Demon's terrace. She heard Demon take a deep breath, before joining her.

"I don't suppose we'd be lucky enough that Lucas would have overlooked, or been unable to control, the castle's security system," Demon said softly, eyeing the glass doors. It was a statement, not a question.

Lily sighed. "One way to find out for sure..." She braced herself, and before Demon could stop her, she stepped forward and reached out for the handle-and almost managed to knock Demon flying when she jumped back with a shriek. Her fingertips were burned, and it felt as if an entire army of minuscule ants was crawling from her fingers up to her elbow underneath her skin. Lily shook her hand, starting to curse loudly. She may not have had Demon's impressive vocabulary, but by now she'd picked up expletives from most of the human and non-human languages spoken on the Excalibur.

She stopped cursing a moment later when Demon quickly let go of her shoulders, with a hiss of pain. The tall blonde stepped back as if she'd been the one who'd burned herself. "Goodness! Lucas must have set the force field to full power!"

Lily put her middle and index fingers into her mouth, trying to soothe the worst pain where her hand had come into direct contact with the handle. "Sowwy," she said around her fingers, feeling sheepish. Demon's empathic powers had diminished significantly since Galen's attack, but the tall blonde could still feel such strong projections of pain when they were close or touching.

It was obvious that Demon hadn't been the only one to notice Lily's pain. *[[Ma? Is everything OK?]]* Dasha's mental voice revealed his worry. Her telepathic son--and probably Marcus, too--seemed to have felt her hurt even in the next room.

[[Yes, darling, I'm all right. I just wasn't careful and hurt my hand a little,]] Lily sent back, while Demon went rummaging in one of her bags, saying something about having brought a regenerator. *[[Auntie Demon has a regenerator here, so I'll be right as rain again in a moment. Don't worry, cub.]]*

Her son laughed at the endearment, which Lily had picked up in old 'Elfquest' comic books about various elf tribes that lived on a planet very similar to Earth. After again promising his mother that they'd be careful if they bounced on the bed, Dasha broke the link, and Lily gave Demon a wry grin. "I guess that wasn't so smart," she admitted, holding out her right hand, palm up.

Demon raised her eyebrows as she ran the regenerator over the tips of Lily's fingers, which looked slightly burned. "At least now we know for sure. Besides, I can't think of any other way to find out. The equipment we'd need to meddle with the security system is in the guard chamber, and it would take all four of us working together to manipulate the force field with our minds." She paused, raising her eyes from Lily's hand to her face. "Better?"

Lily carefully wiggled her fingers, then sighed with relief. "Much better, thank you." She frowned. "Bugger, we need to get out of here." For a few seconds, she chewed her lips, brows furrowed. "I should be able to write a spell to override the force field, without raising the alarm."

"Can you do it without your Grimoire?" Demon asked.

"It would be easier and quicker if I had it, but it's back in my room, so I'll have to make do without. Do you have anything to write on and with?"

Demon nodded. "Just don't tell Marcus that I gave you some of his drawing paper."

Lily gave her sister a wolfish grin. "Let's get to it and show this bastard that the Witches of Eriadne don't admit defeat that easily."

Gideon glared at the door of his cell, wishing he had Angel's powers and could somehow knock it down with his mind. There was little else he could use to get out. A quick search of the cell had revealed it to be identical to the one Dureena had described being held in during their first visit to this planet. It had taken the little thief over a day to break out, and Gideon knew he didn't have anything like her skills as an escapologist. He looked down at his feet and shook his head ruefully. Even his boots were useless. They were molded rubber and leather, very comfortable, but without a metal shank supporting the arch, which is what Dureena had used to help her escape.

The only tool Gideon had was the central prong of his belt buckle. He'd removed the belt and tried using the metal spike to hack away at the door, but so far all he'd succeeded in doing was scratching

the surface of the door a little, and scraping the skin off his knuckles. He sucked at the sore parts of his fingers and wished he knew what was going on elsewhere in the castle. It felt as if days had passed since he'd been confined in the cell, but his wrist link told him only an hour had gone by.

Gideon glared at the link. The communicator was dead, which didn't surprise him. Whoever had captured them would at least have the sense to block communications, something easy enough to do with the technology buried under this Vorlon-built castle. The timer in the link still worked, but it was useless for anything else. It was made up of nice, safe, rounded pieces, so it could never injure the person wearing it. Useless as a tool to help him break out, which was no doubt why his captors hadn't bothered removing it from his wrist.

With a growl of frustration, Gideon flung himself back onto the bunk, glaring at the door again, thinking how inconvenient it was not to be super-human. Why couldn't he have laser eyes that could burn through the door? Or super strength to bulldoze it aside? He half-laughed at himself, deciding that he should really stop reading Marcus' comic-books. He guessed he should just think himself lucky that there was a light in the cell and basic hygiene facilities.

A rattling sound was immediately followed by the cell door being pushed open. For a moment, the figure in the doorway was unrecognizable, as the illumination from the corridor beyond cast a shadow over its face. Then a man stepped into the light of the cell, and everything was explained.

Gideon surged to his feet, but then somehow managed to hold himself still, although every instinct demanded that he should fling himself across the cell and kill this man with his bare hands. This was the man responsible for the death of Dureena's first child, for the murder of one of Gideon's crew while escaping from the Excalibur, for the years of pain and torment Angel had suffered, for the attempted murder of John Matheson, and for the murder of Michael Healy, Angel's husband, a man who had been Gideon's friend.

"Lucas Buck. I should have known. I'd hoped you'd be in hell by now. Did the devil send you back because he thought you'd take over? I guess it would be too much to hope for you to just die and stay dead this time." Gideon forced all the emotion from his voice, keeping all his anger and hatred locked up tight inside him. This wasn't the time or the place to attack Lucas. Gideon could see the shadows of other men on the corridor wall outside the cell. The bastard hadn't come alone, although as usual, he appeared unarmed. Lucas rarely seemed to feel the need to arm himself. Arrogant son-of-a-bitch.

Lucas gave a lazy smile that was nearer to a sneer. "Hoping I'd be dead was stupid. I'd call that the triumph of optimism over experience. I ain't so easy to kill. You should have learned that about me, at least."

Gideon gritted his teeth and grinned at Lucas, responding, "Yeah, just one more thing you have in common with a cockroach."

Lucas let out a snort of laughter. "Careful, Fly-boy. You ain't exactly in a position to be insulting me. I've got this place locked down tight. I've got you and your buddies in cells, I've got your wife and kids stashed away where I can do whatever I like with them, and I've got Angel..." Lucas paused, his smile becoming softer and more leering, "I've got Angel exactly where I want her."

Gideon swallowed and fought to control himself. Everything Lucas had said was true. How in hell was Gideon going to get his family and himself out of this mess? Well, the first step was to find out why they were in the mess in the first place. He wondered whether Lucas would tell him, but decided it would do no harm to ask. "What do you want, Buck? You've gone to a lot of trouble to set all this up. What's in it for you?"

This time it was definitely a sneer that appeared on Lucas' face. "I want your wife..." He paused, obviously waiting for Gideon to react. The retired Captain decided not to give him the satisfaction. He knew Lucas loved to play head games. So he held still, keeping his best poker playing expression in place as he waited for Lucas to go on.

Lucas grinned, acknowledging that Gideon hadn't fallen into his verbal trap, then went on, "I want your wife to choose. Didn't Whiplash tell you this day was coming? I told her over five years ago, on Ceti Gamma III, that she'd have to make a choice. It's time for her to decide."

Gideon felt as if he'd been cast adrift in a sea of confusion. What the hell was Lucas talking about? Choose? Choose what? And what did he mean by the reference to Ceti Gamma III? The only time they'd ever visited that planet was five years earlier, when they'd attended a costume ball and... Gideon's brain went into overdrive, recalling the events of that visit, remembering how Angel had fainted and how they'd had to take her back to the ship. He could hear his wife's words ringing in his head, as loud as if she were standing next to him, saying them again.

"Angel danced with someone who said something to upset her. Something that reminded her of Lucas. She had a flashback to when she was with Lucas, when he frightened her and threatened her. It was so vivid and real that she lost control."

As usual, Deborah hadn't lied, but neither had she told the whole truth. He'd had his suspicions at the time about what had caused Angel's distress, but he'd allowed Deborah and her sisters to keep their secrets. Glaring at Lucas, Gideon whispered softly, "You. Angel danced with you. It was you who frightened her, wasn't it?"

Lucas laughed softly. "Whiplash never told you that, did she? She hid that from you. And I bet she never told you that Angel wasn't the only woman I frightened that night. Whiplash had a scare herself, you know that? A woman who doesn't like heights really shouldn't sit out all by herself, on balconies overhanging ravines. I bet she never told you about the flying lesson I offered her."

Gideon struggled to stay calm. Every part of him wanted to lash out with his fist and smear that gloating smile across Lucas' face. He could almost visualize his own hands wrapped around Lucas' throat, choking the life from him. But he couldn't do that. Not yet. Not until he was back in control of the situation and he could be sure his wife and children were safe. Somehow, Gideon held himself still as Lucas went on.

"It was so easy to fix. You're so damn predictable, Fly-boy. All I had to do was to set up that poker game, and make sure you got wind of it. Then off you went, leaving your women to the care of the teep who's too damn honorable to use his powers, and that Yankee blue-blood doctor. Did you really think those two nancy boys would keep the women safe? Hell, Whiplash has more spine in her than those two wimps combined." Lucas raised the corner of his lip in a sneer and carried on.

"I gave your wife three choices, and I told her that one day I'd come back for her decision. Today's that day. But ain't it interestin' that she never told you? That's one hell of a marriage you have goin' there, Fly-boy. I'd say your wife don't trust you much."

Gideon knew that Lucas was trying to provoke him, insulting his friends, questioning his marriage, trying to make him doubt Deborah. What Lucas didn't know, couldn't know, was that Gideon no longer had any doubts on that score. Since their reconciliation, the one certainty he had in his life was his wife's love for him. If she hadn't told him, she had her reasons, and Gideon had no doubt they'd be good ones. Nothing Lucas could say could shake that belief. So Gideon remained calm, seemingly impervious to Lucas' goading, while he wondered if Deborah had even told her sisters about her encounter with Lucas. Somehow he doubted it.

A slight flicker of a muscle in Lucas' cheek told Gideon that the other man was irritated by the lack of response from his victim. A man like Lucas liked to see his prey squirm. Well, Gideon wasn't going to give him that satisfaction. He said quietly, "Whether Deborah trusts me or not is my concern, not yours. I trust her, so I know she'll have had good reasons for her actions; reasons which are none of your business. So what are these choices you gave her?"

A flash of disappointment crossed Lucas' face, but it was gone so quickly Gideon wondered if he'd imagined it. That expression was instantly replaced with a smile of grim satisfaction. Lucas told Gideon the terms of the deal he'd offered Deborah in lurid detail, and Gideon's heart lurched inside him. He understood completely why Deborah hadn't told him. He knew she could never have made that choice: to give up her son, or her sister, or to betray her husband. What sort of choice was that? An impossible one. And what Lucas couldn't know was that one of those options was no longer available. Even if she'd wanted to, Deborah could no longer give Lucas an heir. So now the choice was between allowing Lucas to take Marcus or Angel.

Gideon shook his head slowly, and said calmly, "It's not going to happen. We'll stop you." He had no idea how at that moment, but he didn't let any of his doubts or fears show in his voice.

Lucas sneered again, "And just how do you plan to do that, Batman? Do you and Robin have an army hidden somewhere I don't know about? You came without your Bat-mobile this time, and you can't count on the colonists to support you. There've been a lot of newcomers to this place since you were last here, and most of them are beholden to me. Any friends of the witches have all been locked away where they can't help you. So it's just you, the teep and the doc. Just how are you gonna stop me?"

Gideon didn't know, but he smiled confidently. "Don't underestimate the sisters, Lucas. You have no idea of the powers they have."

Lucas laughed. "I think I have a pretty good idea, Fly-boy. They worked together to get you out of that Box, and me back into it, remember? But I also know they're only strong when they're together, and that ain't gonna happen until I'm good and ready for them."

He turned and started to leave the cell, but Gideon called after him, making him pause in the doorway.

"Just one question, Lucas. Why did you risk your freedom and your life to come back to Earth and save Angel? You know if we'd caught you, we'd have brain-wiped you. Why is Angel so important to you?"

It was a question Gideon had wanted to ask for a long time. Nearly two years before, Angel had been poisoned by a stalker, and she would have died without Lucas' intervention. At the time, Sarah Chambers had speculated that Lucas had saved Angel because he still loved her. Gideon had never been convinced and he knew that Deborah had shared his doubts. Now might be a chance to find out Lucas' true motivations for performing that single, apparently unselfish act.

Lucas remained frozen in place, his back turned to Gideon. The retired Captain wished he could see Lucas' face. It didn't show much--Lucas had as good a poker face as Gideon--but there were sometimes tiny clues to what the man was feeling. After a few seconds, Lucas turned, and Gideon knew that he had taken the time to arrange his features into the mask of derision he now wore.

"Ain't it obvious, Fly-boy? Marcus is my heir, but Angel can give me a spare. I always like to have back-up."

With that, Lucas turned and left abruptly, slamming the cell door behind him. Gideon stared at the

door for a long moment, sure of one thing. Lucas had just lied to him. Everything else the bastard had said may have been true, but his last words were a lie.

Interesting.

Gideon lifted his belt from the bunk and started hacking at the door again. He had nothing to lose but the skin on his knuckles.

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