

The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes - Part 2: Persuasion

by [The Space Witches](#)



Foiled again!

Chapter 2

When dinner was finally delivered, Lily grabbed a couple of sandwiches and retired to the bedroom, while Demon entertained the children by putting all the plates and utensils on the floor by the windows, saying they'd have a picnic.

While the children pouted a little when told they couldn't go out onto the terrace, they soon settled down to enjoy the feast spread out in front of them. Whoever had put the dinner together must have been familiar with human children, as there were lots of different sandwiches, potato chips, dips and salads, with small cakes and chocolate bars to follow. Best of all was a large tub of ice cream, which made Demon smile in fond memory of certain things she and Matthew had done together in the bedroom next door. She could only hope that they would get through this and have a chance to enjoy each other in the same way in the future.

Fruit juices and milk had also been provided, and the living room was soon filled with the sounds of contented munching, accompanied by Marcus and Faylinn carrying on their usual verbal dueling, with Dasha occasionally intervening when they got too rude, and Naima taking it all in, as she always did. Demon was therefore free to concentrate on keeping Mattie happy. The little girl was miserable about being separated from her father for so long, and she had to be coaxed into eating. Eventually Marcus succeeded in getting her to eat where Demon had failed. Sensing that his mother's patience was running short, he abandoned his sparring with Faylinn to take his little sister by the hand and cajole her into trying some of the food.

Demon sent him a grateful *[[Thanks!]]* through their link, then settled down to eat a little herself. She wasn't hungry, and every mouthful tasted like sawdust, but she knew she couldn't allow the children to sense her anxieties about what was going on elsewhere in the castle.

Her mind kept spinning around the same questions, over and over. Where were Matthew and Angel being held? What was Lucas doing to them? He had assured Demon that her sister was safe, but could she believe him? And where were John and Luke, and were they safe, too? When would Lucas make good on his promise to let Demon and her children see Matthew? And most persistent of all, the nagging question of how Lucas would react when he found that Demon could no longer deliver on one of the options he had given her. She could no longer give him an heir.

Every day since Galen had attacked her, Demon had thought about her inability to bear more children of her own. Her hatred for the Technomage had grown over the years, as the injury he had done to her gradually invaded every aspect of her life. It had contributed to Demon and Matthew drawing apart from each other over the previous year, culminating in Demon nearly losing her husband. She had no idea how she could go on living without Matthew, and that thought only brought her mind spinning back to the first question. Where was Matthew? Was he safe? Had Lucas harmed him in any way?

Lucas was quite capable of twisting his words and his promises. He had promised that she would see her husband again, but he'd made no commitment as to Matthew's state of health when that happened. Would Lucas be cruel enough to present her with her husband's dead body? The thought sent a shudder of pain and distress through the tall blonde, too strong to be suppressed.

Marcus must have picked up on her fear, as he sent, *[[Mum? Are you OK?]]*

Demon looked up to find her son looking at her anxiously. She sent a wave of love and reassurance back to him, sending, *[[I'm OK, Marcus, really. Just a little anxious about the others. I hope Auntie Lily will be finished with her spell soon, so we can get out of here.]]*

Lily and Demon had explained to the children that they didn't want to be confined to the two rooms, so they were making plans to escape. They had said they wanted to surprise Lucas, who didn't think they could get out without help. It wasn't entirely untrue, so Demon had gone along with the story. While giving every appearance of accepting what was said, Demon knew that her son wasn't fooled. While Marcus hadn't been able to sense the evil inside Lucas, he'd spent enough time with his ancestor to recognize that something was wrong. When they had linked, Marcus had confided that he didn't like Lucas at all.

[[He's sneaky, Mummy. He twists things, and he doesn't like Dad.]] The memory of her son's words warmed Demon. There was no greater crime in Marcus' book than failing to like and admire his father.

When dinner was finished, Demon tried to send the children into the bathroom, but it was immediately apparent that they were too old now to agree to bath together, although the tub was plenty big enough

for all of them. Demon smiled to herself at Marcus' outrage at the suggestion that he share a bath with Faylinn and Naima. Dasha and Mattie didn't bother him at all, and all Lily's children were quite happy to share, but Marcus had become a little shy in the presence of the girls.

They solved the problem by Marcus and Dasha playing together in the living room, while Demon supervised the girls in the bathroom. When Faylinn, Naima and Mattie were ready for bed, Demon took them through to her bedroom, and tucked them up into the big bed there, while Lily moved all her papers into the living room, after kissing her children good night in a slightly absent minded fashion. Once Lily got focused on a spell, there was no distracting her.

Marcus muttered under his breath when he saw just how much of his drawing paper his aunt was using, but Demon quickly hustled him and Dasha into the bathroom, leaving Lily in peace.

When she had finally got the boys to climb into the opposite end of the bed from the girls, Demon emerged from her bedroom to find that Lily was still deeply engrossed in her work. The little red-head sat cross legged on the floor in front of the French windows, muttering to herself in a language Demon neither recognized nor understood. She had never studied the 'magical' elements of the sisters' powers. When needed, she had linked or merged with her sisters, and acquired whatever knowledge was needed for a specific event. The problem with that kind of learning was that it never stuck. So now Demon could do little to help Lily with her efforts to break through the force field that prevented them from leaving the room.

Dropping the pile of bed-covers she carried onto one of the sofas, Demon curled up in the corner of the other couch, and waited for Lily to finish.

"Demon, wake up!" Lily shook her sister awake and grinned down at the bleary eyed blonde. Demon never had been good at waking up. It always took her a few minutes to come around.

"What? What's happening? What time is it?" Demon rubbed her eyes and sat upright on the sofa, peering across the room at the clock on the wall.

"It's gone midnight, and I think I've got it." Lily shook her head in irritation at the blank look her sleepy sister was giving her. "The spell. I think I've got the spell we need to break the force field."

Demon's eyes opened wide and she stood abruptly. "Then let's do it! What do you need me to do?"

Lily grabbed Demon's hand and dragged her over to the French windows. "Here. Sit there." She pointed at the floor and lowered herself quickly to sit cross-legged next to her older sister. "Now, take my hand and link. I know we can't really merge any more, and it wouldn't work with only two of us anyway, but we need to get as close to a merge as we can. Do you think you can do that?"

Lily looked anxiously into Demon's frowning face. The little red-head knew that her sister had lost many of her powers when the Vorlon within her had retreated, and even more after Galen's attack, but she was hoping that Demon retained some remnant of the skills she had once used to bind the sisters together into the powerful weapon they had been.

Demon tried to smile, but it was a weak attempt. "I'll try, Lily. I'll do my best."

Lily squeezed her sister's hand. "That's all I can ask. Now focus."

They both closed their eyes and concentrated. Lily opened her mind in a way she hadn't since her sisters had left the Excalibur. Her sharing with John and Luke, even with her children, was completely

different to what she became when truly linked to her sisters. When they had merged, they had lost all sense of self, becoming part of a new whole, a new entity with its own purpose and goals.

Only Demon had ever really remembered what they became and what they achieved when merged, but Lily had flashes of memory. Memories of power, of strength beyond her small body's physical capabilities. Part of her yearned to feel that power again, even knowing it was no longer possible. The sisters had made their choices and had chosen to abandon that power. Anything she and Demon could now achieve could only be a shadow of their former merge. But even that shadow was stronger than anything Lily could do alone.

She focused on her link to Demon and felt her mind slide into its old accustomed place in the merge. She felt like half a person, weak and disoriented, as the two other elements of the merge, Ilas and Angel, were missing, but Lily focused more intensely, putting more of herself and her energies into her link to Demon. She threw all her love for John and Luke, all her passion for them, all the pain of loss and separation she was feeling into the link, and used the energy to build the power of the merge.

Lily could feel Demon drawing on her inner strength, that core of steel that ran through the tall blonde, the strength that had enabled her to lead her sisters in rebellion against the Vorlon, to stand firm and refuse to be used by anyone. Lily drew on that strength and channeled it into her spell.

Murmuring the words of the old language, Lily opened her eyes, lifted her hand--the hand that clasped Demon's tightly--and moved it toward the force field. She knew she couldn't allow any doubts to enter her mind. She had to believe with all her heart and soul that their joint energies could overcome the barrier before them. If they believed it, it would be true. They wouldn't be burned by the power of the force field. Instead they would draw on it, take it into themselves and use it.

The sisters' joined hands touched the force field and it flared, but instead of repelling them, it pulled their hands in, the power flowing around their fingers, bathing them in light. Lily kept on chanting, drawing the forces into herself, and when she could hold no more, channeling it into Demon.

After a few moments, the force field faded and died. Lily slowly dropped her hand, then let go of Demon, before turning to her sister and grinning widely.

"Wow! That was a rush."

The two witches fell about with laughter for a couple of moments, before Demon sobered and said, "OK, that's step one. Now we have to take the second step."

Lily swallowed, feeling all her sister's anxiety. The next step was a big one.

It was after midnight when Lucas returned, and stood over Angel, watching as she slept. He considered picking her up and carrying her through to the bedroom, but he stopped himself, knowing the movement would wake her.

Lucas was a bastard, but not a complete one, at least not when he didn't want to be. He knew Angel was exhausted, and while he had returned to get her answer, he didn't see any harm in waiting a little longer for it and letting her sleep.

Squatting down on his haunches, Lucas reached out and gently brushed away a strand of hair that had fallen across Angel's face. She stirred in her sleep and turned over onto her back. Lucas' eyes moved down to where her T-shirt pulled up to reveal the soft, white flesh of her flat belly. His eyes drifted up to her breasts, emphasized by the tight T-shirt. Lucas resisted the desire to slip a hand up

under her top and fondle those twin peaks. A slow, predatory smile spread across his face. Soon enough he'd get to do that, and he would enjoy every second of Angel moaning and writhing in pleasure beneath his touch.

He was just about to reach out and stroke her cheek when he sensed something. He stood, his eyes narrowing as he let his senses stretch out to another part of the castle.

"Well, that ain't very clever," drawled Lucas softly.

He glanced down at the sleeping form, reached out a hand and caressed her cheek. "Sleep, love. I'll be back for your answer later."

Then he moved swiftly towards the door. Two of his guests were being very naughty and it was time to catch them in the act.

"OK, Demon, are you sure those knots are tied tightly?" Lily's whisper carried in the darkness of the terrace and Demon hushed her hurriedly.

Reaching out her hand, she touched Lily and sent, *[[Sound carries out here, remember? It echoes off the castle walls. I'm sure Lucas has guards patrolling the place, so if you need to say anything, touch me and send!]]*

Lily sent back a contrite, *[[Sorry! I'm just a bit nervous about the strength of the knotted sheets. Are you sure they'll carry my weight when you lower me down to the courtyard?]]*

Demon gave a mental chuckle. *[[They'll carry your weight easily. Mine would be a different matter. Now, tuck your skirts up in your knickers--if you're wearing any--and get ready to climb over the parapet. Just hang onto the sheet and I'll lower you slowly, OK?]]*

Lily's mental grumbling came through their link loud and clear, but she did as her sister asked, letting go of her hand, then tucking her skirts up to leave her slender legs bare as she tied the sheet around her waist. She then stood on the bench, and lifted herself onto the parapet, swinging her legs out over the edge and looking down.

Demon swallowed hastily, knowing that she could never have done what Lily was doing now. Her fear of heights would have paralyzed her before she could have climbed onto the parapet. That fear had gotten much worse since Demon's encounter with Lucas on the palace balcony on Ceti Gamma III. The tall blonde wasn't even sure she would be able to look over the edge of her terrace now, something she had done often when she'd lived on Eriadne.

Fortunately, their escape plan didn't involve Demon having to scale any heights, or even look over any drops. She just had to supply the muscle to lower her tiny sister gently, and silently, to the courtyard below. Lily would then make her way back into the castle, and if the door to Demon's rooms was no longer guarded, set her sister free. If the guards were still in place, Lily had a spell all ready to go, which would soon put them to sleep.

Demon gave silent thanks for the darkness of the night. Eriadne had no large moon to light the sky, just several small satellites, only one of which was in the sky at that moment, doing little to illuminate the castle. She could barely make out her sister's form perched on the edge of the parapet, but there was just enough light for her to see Lily raise her hand and wave, giving Demon the signal to start lowering.

The tall blonde pulled in the slack of the makeshift rope they had made from sheets, and watched as Lily twisted herself, and dropped silently off the edge. The rope tightened, and Demon started to move slowly across the terrace, each soundless step lowering her sister closer to the ground. When she reached the parapet, Demon started to let the rope slide very slowly through her hands. She knew Lily must be getting close to ground level by now, and she held the rope tightly, waiting for the tug that meant Lily was down and safe.

Suddenly, the whole courtyard was flooded with light and the sound of harsh laughter echoed around the castle.

Demon looked over the edge and she was appalled to see Lucas Buck sauntering across the courtyard, his thumbs hooked into his jeans, laughing as he crossed the empty space. He appeared entirely alone, but Demon had no doubt that his men were nearby. When she peered down nervously, she could see that Lily was still a meter or so above the ground, but before Demon could lower her the rest of the way, Lucas sprang forward and lifted the little red-head into his arms.

Demon watched helplessly as Lily screamed and lashed out at Lucas, but he held her fast as he looked up at Demon and grinned.

"Looks like someone's dropping flowers from heaven tonight. Maybe I should just pluck the petals off this one, now you've been so kind as to deliver her straight to me."

Demon leaned over the parapet yelling, "Leave her alone, Lucas!" In her panic and fury, she almost forgot to be afraid of the drop beneath her.

Lily continued to struggle as Lucas laughed again, "Or what? You gonna come down out of your ivory tower and deal with me, Whiplash? Oh, that's right. You don't much like heights, do you?" He turned to grin at Lily, who had stopped struggling in his arms, and had untied the knotted sheets from around her waist, but who was now glaring at him defiantly. "I think you're on your own, Lily-love. Looks like your big sister still ain't learned to fly. Are you ready to pay the price for your disobedience?"

Demon yelled again, "This was my idea, Lucas! Punish me, not her!"

Lucas laughed, looking up at Demon. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, Whiplash? I do remember how you loved to be spanked. But you shouldn't keep all the pleasure to yourself, you know. Maybe lovely Lily here would like her share." He turned to look at Lily, who started to struggle again, now trying to bite her captor.

Laughing even louder, Lucas threw Lily over his shoulder, bringing his hand down on her butt with a loud slap. He grinned up at Demon and said, "I'll bring her back to you later. Don't wait up."

With that Lucas sauntered across the courtyard, whistling softly to himself, with Lily writhing and squirming on his shoulder, screaming at him to let her go.

Demon sank to her knees at the edge of her terrace and started to sob. What had she done? She couldn't even protect Lily from the monster who now held them captive. She had lost her sisters and her husband, she couldn't protect them, couldn't save them, could do nothing but watch helplessly as the creature from her worst nightmares carried the people she loved away, leaving her wondering if she would ever see them again.

Gideon swore softly as the pain from his bleeding knuckles once again made him clumsy. He'd torn his

shirt into strips and wrapped the cloth around his hands to prevent the blood getting onto the delicate parts he was working on, but the bandages didn't ease the pain. Neither did they help his fingers move with the delicacy he now needed if his escape plan was going to work.

Shaking his hair out of his eyes, Gideon sat upright, easing the ache in his spine. He took a moment to unwrap the bloodstained strips of cloth from around each hand, flexing his fingers gently, wincing at the pain the movement produced. The knuckles of both hands were scored deeply and they still oozed blood. Gideon's attack on the door panel covering the lock, using his belt buckle, had eventually succeeded in cracking the hard plastic covering, but the fragments and splinters had been sharp and had cut into his hands deeply, as he'd pried more and more pieces away, finally exposing the lock mechanism.

Tearing another two strips from the remains of his shirt, Gideon wrapped the fresh bandages around his fingers and returned to his task. His commlink bracelet lay in pieces on the bed, and he was now engaged in carefully rearranging the crystals that made up the power source. If he could align them correctly, they would discharge all their energy in one flash. Applying that flash of energy to the correct part of the electronic lock on the cell door should deactivate it.

That was the theory anyway. Gideon knew that if he didn't get it quite right he could a) not get any energy discharge at all, b) apply it to the wrong part of the lock and achieve nothing or c)--worst of all--apply it in such a way as to fuse the lock solid, sealing himself inside the cell. In that case, they'd need a battering ram to get the door down, or they'd have to wait until they could pull his skeleton out, one bone at a time, through the narrow slot at the base of the door.

The tray of food that had been pushed through that slot a few hours earlier still sat untouched on the floor on the far side of the cell. Gideon had no way to be certain if it was drugged or not, and knowing Lucas, it could even have been poisoned. So the retired Captain had pushed the tray to one side, having made sure it contained nothing that might help him escape, and he'd concentrated on ignoring the rumbling of his belly. Even the water supply was suspect, and Gideon had tasted it gingerly at first, but it seemed fresh and untainted, so he'd eventually shrugged and drank his fill, then bathed his battered knuckles under the cold stream coming from the tap above the molded basin.

Biting his lip in concentration, Gideon finally got the crystals aligned as he wanted them within the broken shell of the bracelet, without them actually touching. He stood carefully, leaving the commlink lying on the bed, and took another piece of his torn shirt and wet it in the basin. Once it was dripping with moisture, Gideon carried the strip back to the door, and wrung it out over the lock. The water would help conduct the electrical spark he hoped to create.

When the lock was dripping, Gideon dried his hands carefully on the remnant of his shirt and took a deep breath. Keeping his hands as steady as possible, he gently lifted his commlink from the bed, and carried it to the door, making sure that the crystals stayed in alignment.

Moving the bracelet carefully, Gideon pushed the broken end against the lock, then gently tilted it, allowing the crystals to slide into contact with each other and the door.

There was a blinding flash of light as the crystals discharged all their stored energy and Gideon felt himself lifted off his feet, and thrown to the far side of the room, crashing down onto the bunk. The sound he made as he landed was the only noise created by the otherwise silent detonation. When he got his breath back, the renewed pain in Gideon's hands drew his attention, and he realized that as well as bruised and skinned knuckles, he now had badly burned fingertips. The nerve endings throbbed with pain where they were exposed by the removal of several layers of skin, and blood oozed out of the cracked and blackened surfaces.

Gideon bit his lip and moved over to the basin, using his wrist to turn on the cold tap, and letting the cool flow of water soothe the burns. Then he turned his head and looked at the door. Had it worked? Or had he just sealed himself inside what could become his tomb?

A grin of relief crossed his face as he saw that the door to his cell now stood slightly ajar. It had worked. Now he just had to find Luke and hope that the doctor carried a regenerator with him, to fix Gideon's damaged hands. Wrapping his hands in the torn halves of what was left of his shirt, Gideon shook his head, hoping that he wouldn't need to use them again. They were now swathed in so much cloth that he had no feeling at all. Other than the pain, of course.

Moving to the door, Gideon used his elbow to ease it open a little then peered out. The corridor outside was empty as far as he could see, so he pushed the door a little further, opening it just far enough so he could look around to the other side of the passage. Empty. The retired Captain shook his head in disapproval. He would never have left prisoners unguarded on the Excalibur, no matter how much he trusted the technology of the brig.

Gideon moved out into the corridor, running quickly but soundlessly to the Guard Captain's office at the end. He remembered meeting with Nikarran there on more than one occasion, and for a moment his mind was filled with sadness for the loss of the old Brakiri Guard Captain. He'd been a good man and a good friend.

Finding the office empty, Gideon slid inside and then winced as he tried to open the key cupboard with his swaddled hands. It was awkward work, but eventually he got it open and leaned in to take the bunch of keys off the hook inside with his teeth. Now he just had to find the cells where the others were being kept. He had absolutely no doubt that Lucas would have captured John and Luke, too, and chances were that they were also confined in these cells. He might also find Lily and the children here, although it was almost too much to hope that Deborah and Angel were confined in this part of the castle.

Running lightly down the corridor, still gripping the key holder in his teeth, Gideon soon discovered that only one cell door was closed. Although he couldn't be sure that this was where John and Luke were imprisoned, Gideon decided it was a good bet. And if it weren't John or Luke inside, it was someone else Lucas didn't like. Any enemy of Lucas was a friend as far as Gideon was concerned.

Taking the key ring gingerly between his bandaged hands, Gideon tried to insert the key into the lock and turn it. Five times he succeeded in getting a key in place, but each time the lock resisted. His fingers were burning with pain, and sweat was prickling his brow, when at the sixth attempt, the lock clicked and the door swung open.

Lily marched back into Demon's rooms, straightening her clothes and ignoring the laughter from outside the door. She resisted the temptation to slam the door behind her, closing it quietly and looking around the room. Demon was nowhere in sight. A quick glance into the bedroom showed all the children were sleeping, but again, Demon was nowhere to be seen. That just left one place she could be.

Throwing open the door to the terrace, Lily rushed out to find her sister curled up in a ball by the parapet, sobbing softly. The little red-head ran across and took Demon into her arms, saying, "It's OK, Demon! He didn't hurt me, I'm quite safe. There's nothing to cry about, honestly."

Demon looked up and sobbed her relief as she saw her sister safely returned. "Oh Lily, I was sure he was going to hurt you! Are you sure you're all right? What did he do? Where did he take you?"

Lily smoothed back the blonde curls from her older sister's face and smiled gently. "He didn't do

anything. He just carried me back inside the castle, dumped me rather unceremoniously onto a sofa, then told me not to try anything so stupid again." The little red-head gave a slightly puzzled laugh. "He actually told me that I could have injured myself climbing down from your terrace, and he didn't want anyone getting hurt. I know it sounds odd, but I think I believed him."

Helping Demon to her feet, Lily ushered her sister back into the living room, settling her down on the sofa as she went on, "Lucas said he needed something only you or Angel can provide, and once one of you has agreed to give it to him, he'll be satisfied and he'll leave us alone. I let him think I didn't know what he was talking about, but I think he meant it. He doesn't want to hurt us if he can avoid it."

Lily had allowed herself to hope that Lucas' words to her had been true, and that John and Luke would therefore be safe. Lucas had certainly matched his actions to his words, courteously escorting her back to Demon's rooms. When they had arrived at the door, Lily had watched as an almost feral grin crossed his face, and he suddenly reached out and grabbed her, pulling her close against him and kissing her hard and fast. As the guards had watched and laughed, Lucas had whispered in Lily's ear, "I still remember that time we had together, Lily-love. I know damn well it was good for you, too."

Then he'd let her go, and pushed her through the open door, laughing at her expression of shock and surprise. Lily had to admit to herself that Lucas' kiss hadn't been entirely unpleasant. The feel of his mouth on hers and the taste of his lips brought back memories of the brief time they had spent together. And of course the bastard was right. It had been good--OK, more than good. Try phenomenal--for Lily, too.

Pushing those thoughts and memories away, Lily focused on her sister. Demon had stopped crying, and was looking up at Lily, her eyes full of hope. "Do you really think so, Lily? Do you really think he'll let us go without hurting any of us? But how can we give him what he wants? I can't carry his child and Angel..." Demon shook her head and the tears started to flow down her face again. "I won't let her sacrifice herself to save us, Lily. I can't let her do that."

Lily took her big sister in her arms and rocked her gently, saying, "There's nothing we can do about it tonight anyway. Let's get what sleep we can, then think about it in the morning. Remember, Lucas promised we could see John, Luke and Matthew tomorrow. We'll all feel better when we're back together again."

The tall blonde gradually calmed, and Lily quickly made up beds for them on the sofas, then curled up under her blanket and wished Demon goodnight.

As she closed her eyes, Lily sent her thoughts and her love to her men, hoping, believing, that they were safe and that she'd see them again soon.

Luke looked up abruptly as the door to the cell was flung open. A tall, bare-chested man stood in the doorway, trying to push damp hair out of his eyes and off his sweaty brow. For a moment, Luke wondered why Lucas looked so disheveled, then he saw the silvery strands that streaked the man's hair.

"Matt!" John cried out the name as he rushed at the man in the doorway.

Matt grimaced as John paused uncertainly. It was obvious the telepath wanted to fling his arms around his friend and hug him, but he hesitated, always hesitating when it came to physical contact. Matt solved the dilemma by grinning and holding his hands up in the air as he said, "Go easy there, John. It's Matt here, not Lily."

Luke half laughed as he stood, then frowned as he noticed the make-shift bandages wrapped around

Matt's hands. Bandages that showed traces of blood seeping through.

"What have you been doing to yourself? Let me see those hands." Luke voice sounded sharper than it should, but he was concerned at what he could see.

Gideon shook his head. "No time, Doc. We need to get out of here. Lucas must be keeping the women and children confined elsewhere in the castle. This is the only locked cell down here."

John interjected quickly, "Lucas? It's definitely him then? We suspected as much."

Gideon nodded, trying to get his hands away from Luke, who was now carefully unwrapping the bandages. Gideon yelped as the cloth stuck to one of his fingertips caught on the raw, oozing flesh exposed by the burns. He tried to pull his hands away from Luke saying, "Quit it! Unless you have a regenerator and can fix the damage, leave them the hell alone, Luke!"

Luke shook his head and tutted over the damage he could see. "I don't have a regenerator here with me, but we need to get those hands fixed soon, Matt, before any infection sets in. You've banged them up pretty badly, and they need treatment."

Matt shrugged and pulled his hands carefully away from Luke. "Not much we can do now, is there? Let's get out of here, and you can fix the damage as soon as we get hold of a regenerator. In the meantime, John will have to handle any rough stuff."

John muttered about being just as capable at breaking his hand on someone else's chin as Gideon, causing Luke to snort with amusement. He remembered the time when he and Gideon had broken *into* a prison to rescue Angel, and Gideon had broken his fingers when he'd knocked out a guard.

"Let's see if we can restrict the hand damage to what's been done so far, shall we? What's going on here, Matt? Why is Lucas here and what does he want?" Luke looked up at Gideon curiously, carefully wrapping the soiled bandages back around Matt's damaged fingers. He wished he had something better to offer, but he didn't.

Matt spoke quickly and quietly, summarizing what Lucas had told him, as Luke made sure the cloth wouldn't shift and rub the raw wounds underneath. As Gideon came to an end, John said quietly, "We have to find Angel and Demon. They're the ones most at risk from Lucas. Do we split up or go together?"

Luke looked up in time to see Gideon grimace as he flexed his fingers. "We split up. Luke, you go look for Angel. Start with her old rooms, then the library, then..." Matt paused and shrugged. "You know the castle better than I do. Go wherever you think Lucas might be hiding her. I'll look for Deborah. She was in her rooms when I left. I'll go back and take care of the guard, then bring her and Mattie back here. We'll never make it back to the ship undetected with all the children, so we'd be better off taking a strong defensive position and negotiating. We need to get the women and children back here to the cell block, where we can defend them. This is probably one of the most defensible positions in the castle, so it's a good place to hole up." He paused and Luke could tell he was thinking things through, trying to work out their best moves.

Before Matt could speak again, John said, "While you two find Angel and Demon, I should go looking for weapons. I take it there are none in Nikarran's old office?" John looked at Gideon quizzically, and the retired Captain shook his head. John went on, "Then the next best bet is the armory. I'll get as many weapons as I can and bring them back here."

Before Luke could do anything but nod, John said quietly, "I'm hoping that Lily and the children might be with Demon, but once we have her and Angel safe, we'll go find the rest of the family and bring

them all here, OK?" John hadn't had to read Luke's mind to know where his anxieties lay.

Gideon nodded sharply and started to turn to leave the cell, when Luke called him back. "Matt? How do you plan to 'take care' of the guard with your hands in that state?"

The retired Captain turned back and gave Luke a wicked grin. "I plan on picking up a very big stick on my way up there, and hitting him very hard with it. I don't need much movement in my hands to do that, do I, Doc?"

Luke shook his head and half laughed. "No delicate touch required for that, Matt. Let's go."

The three men left the cell quietly, slipping along the deserted corridors until they came to the entrance to the main courtyard. It was pitch black outside, and Luke couldn't see across the yard to the far side, but he knew this was where they needed to split up. He would go straight across to Angel's old rooms, while John would take a left turn to head for the armory. The corridor leading to Demon's quarters was on the right.

Luke heard Gideon's whispered, "See you back at the cell block," then felt the air shift as the retired Captain moved off to the right.

The soft touch of John's lips on his left cheek was followed by a whisper. "Take care. Don't do anything stupid."

Luke murmured, "Ditto," then set out across the center of the courtyard. He had gotten no more than three paces when the lights came on, turning dark night into brightly lit day. Luke froze like a rabbit in the headlights, temporarily blinded by the glare. Turning his eyes away from the lights, he squeezed his eyelids together and could just make out John's figure, backing into the courtyard, his arms raised above his head.

A quick turn of his head revealed that Gideon had re-emerged from the darkness of the right-hand corridor, and was also standing in the full glare of the lights, with his hands held high.

A hulking, human male carrying a gun emerged from each corridor, and for a moment, Luke felt disoriented. The two men were identical in features and size, the only difference between them being their clothes. A voice from behind him soon distracted Luke's attention away from the sensation of seeing double.

"Well, gentlemen. Didn't you like the accommodations I provided for you? Not quite what you were looking for on this trip, I guess. Maybe the beds weren't quite soft enough for you? Or maybe you wanted a better view?"

Lucas Buck strode into the light, his face twisted into a grin as sarcastic as his tone. He shook his head sadly as he went on, "And there I was thinking I'd been mighty hospitable to you folks. I guess there's no pleasing some people."

Gideon turned and glared at Lucas, spitting out venomously, "Your hospitality leaves a lot to be desired, Lucas. Let us go to our wives, let us be with our children, that's all we want. Then you won't have to worry about us breaking out and running around the castle, will you?"

Lucas half-laughed, saying, "Oh, I'm not worried at all, Fly-boy. You ain't goin' nowhere, except back into a cell. I promised your wife she could see you tomorrow--well, later today actually, since you boys are running around in the middle of the night when all good folk should be in their beds asleep. I'm a man of my word, so you'll all get back together when I'm good and ready."

Gesturing to the two identical men who had taken position behind the captives, with their rifles raised, Lucas said, "Bubba and Harry here are gonna take you back to your cell. As you didn't seem to like the one we gave you, Fly-boy, you can bunk in with your friends. That'll be nice and cozy, and you can talk all night if you like. You won't disturb anyone."

The two men closed in on Luke, John and Matt, nudging them toward the corridor leading to the cell block. Luke called over to Lucas, "Will you let me go to the infirmary before you take us back? I need to get a regenerator." He gestured at Gideon's bandaged hands.

Lucas peered at Matt, pursing his lips as he saw the torn shirt wrapped around Gideon's hands. "Wondered why you were wandering around half-naked. I thought maybe you were trying to impress the ladies."

Gideon half-snarled and raised one bandaged hand, but John held him back, as Lucas turned to Luke, shaking his head. "There're no regenerators in the infirmary, Doc. There's nothing there at all. After you took the ladies out of here, the ISA moved in and stripped the place. They left the villagers without medical supplies or a healer of any kind. The next time sickness hit the village, they were helpless. That's why there're so many newcomers since your time. That's why it was so easy for me to move in on this place. The people here needed a leader, someone who'd take care of them. I made damned sure that one of my men filled that role."

Lucas was in his element and Luke felt sick. Had they really left the villagers so vulnerable? Had the ISA really exploited this place so badly? Why hadn't their friends told them anything in their messages? Luke could only assume that people like Kirrin hadn't wanted to worry him or the sisters about how badly things had gone after they left. He wondered, [Surely Kirrin would have told us if something like that had happened? Or did she hide the facts from us, not wanting to worry us, until it was too late? Is that why we haven't heard from her in months? I hope nothing has happened to her.]

Then he had another thought. [More likely, Lucas is lying.] Luke tried to reassure himself that this was to be expected, but a nagging doubt remained in his mind.

Gesturing again toward the corridor that led to the cell block, Lucas said, "Fly-boy will just have to deal with his sore hands for a while. Maybe that'll teach him to stay put. Now, it's way past my bedtime, and we've got a long day ahead of us tomorrow, so I'm going to bid you gentlemen good night. I won't say 'sweet dreams'; I guess that would be too much to expect."

Lucas started to turn away, but he stopped and turned back, grinning broadly as he said, "Just to make sure you understand, if you try to get out again, there'll be trouble. But it won't be you boys who'll pay the price. It'll be your ladies who get punished. Have I made myself clear?"

The three men nodded reluctantly, and allowed themselves to be hustled back to the cells.

When the door slammed behind them, Gideon sat on the bunk, holding his head in his bandaged hands for a moment, before looking up at John and Luke, and saying, "Any ideas?"

Luke looked over at John, then back at Matt. Both men shook their heads.

Gideon sighed. "I think we're stuck here for the moment at least. May as well try to make ourselves comfortable. Who wants first shift on the bunk?"

Day 2 - morning

Demon woke abruptly as the door to her rooms was flung open and banged back against the wall. She rolled off the sofa, wrapping herself in the blanket under which she had slept, and watched as Sol entered the room, shaking his head and saying to the large man who stood behind him in the corridor, "Harry, you have really gotta learn how to open doors slowly. You don't always have to make a grand entrance."

Sol turned and smiled at the two women now facing him. Lily had also been wakened by the noise, and now stood next to Demon, also wrapped in her blanket. From the light coming through the windows, Demon guessed it was soon after dawn. A quick check on her mental link with her son revealed that he was still asleep. The tall blonde tried to link to Angel again, but without success.

"Good morning, ladies. I hope you slept well?" Sol gave an ingratiating smile and went on, "Breakfast will be delivered in a little while, but first the Boss has sent me to offer you a deal."

Demon drew herself up to her full height and gave Sol one of her most intimidating looks. "Your boss hasn't yet kept the last promise he made to us. Why should we believe him this time?"

Sol's smile disappeared and he looked almost sorrowful. Demon stretched her senses and found that he genuinely believed what he was saying as he went on, "Lucas Buck is a man of his word. Never doubt that, ladies. If he said he'd do something, then he'll do it, although he might take his time about it. But if you agree to what he's offering now, you won't have to wait for him to deliver. I can do it for him."

Demon sighed and pulled the blanket more tightly around her, very much aware that she wore only her bra and panties underneath, having stripped off her clothes before rolling herself into the blanket the night before. "What's the deal this time?"

Sol smiled again. "Lucas would like you to join him for breakfast. If you agree, and come quietly, I can release the force field on the door to the terrace, and you and your kids can have access to it today. I'm sure we won't have any more escape attempts, will we? I've got guards stationed in the courtyard, just in case you haven't learned from last night's experiences."

Lily moved closer to Demon and touched her hand, sending, *[[I don't trust this man!]]* The little redhead then said aloud, "We're not leaving the children here on their own."

Sol smiled and shook his head. "Oh, sorry. I didn't make myself clear. Mrs. Gideon is the only one invited to breakfast with the Boss. You can stay here with the kids."

Demon stiffened. What game was Lucas playing this time? Before she could respond to the invitation, Lily's thought sounded in her head. *[[I'm not sure this is a good idea, Demon. You shouldn't see him alone.]]*

The tall blonde totally agreed, but she also knew that the children would be dreadfully unhappy if they were confined to these rooms all day. At least if they had access to the terrace they could run around in the fresh air and sunshine. The sun streaming through the windows made it obvious that it was going to be a warm, sunny day.

Demon sighed softly, sending, *[[I think I'd better go, Lily. Not just to give the children some room to run, but to see if I can find out what's happened to Angel. She might be there with him, and I may be able to find out where Matthew, Luke and John are.]]*

Not knowing where her husband was, or what was being done to him, was tearing Demon apart. She kept all her pain and concern hidden, but she was desperate for news about Matthew. If breakfast with Lucas was the price she had to pay, then so be it.

Raising her head imperiously, Demon said quietly, "You have a deal. I'll be with you in a moment." Being careful not to let the blanket slip, Demon grabbed her clothes from the foot of the sofa, where she had left them neatly folded the night before, and retreated into the bedroom, leaving Lily and Sol glaring at each other.

As she tiptoed across the room, making sure she didn't disturb the still sleeping children, Demon couldn't help smiling to herself. Glaring at Lily was like trying to outstare a cat. Sol didn't stand a chance.

Demon dropped her clothes into a linen basket, then quietly stooped and opened one of her bags. She pulled out one of Matthew's shirts: a black one she knew would hang loosely on her. She then found a pair of black jeans, as well as fresh underwear. Retreating into the bathroom to wash and change, Demon decided to wear the shirt hanging outside the jeans, buttoned up to the neck.

Lucas watched as the tall blonde walked into the small dining room, and couldn't help chewing his lip in disappointment. While her face was as chillingly beautiful as ever, her stunning body was concealed by the long, baggy man's shirt she wore. She looked more like a nun than the leather clad dominatrix look he remembered so well, which had caused him to give her the nickname 'Whiplash'.

Even the loose fitting shirt couldn't completely hide the swell of her breasts, and Lucas found himself remembering fondly when he'd seen those breasts uncovered before him. When he'd taken over Gideon's body all those years before, Demon had been the first woman he'd had. He'd always been a little sentimental about her as a result, particularly after her kindness to him when his back had been injured.

As the tall blonde walked toward him, her face frozen into an impassive stare, Lucas told himself not to be a fool. This was the woman who had led the sisters into expelling him from Gideon's body, and imprisoning him back in the Box. He would never forgive her for that. She had left him there to rot, locking the Box away in one of the cellars deep beneath the castle. If his Angel hadn't come to him there, making mental contact with him, allowing him to see through her eyes and watch the daily life on Eriadne, Lucas sometimes thought he might have gone mad.

Imprisoned and weakened as his spirit had been then, he would never have had the strength to reach out with his mind. He'd have been totally isolated, deprived of all sensation, if Angel hadn't come to him when she did. Lucas knew that he owed Angel his sanity as well as his new life. One of the many reasons why he love--

Lucas shook his head. Love? Was that what he'd been about to think? How stupid could he get? He didn't love anyone or anything. He'd certainly never be stupid enough to fall in love with a woman. If he did that, he might be dumb enough to do something noble or self-sacrificing. The very thought brought a cruel smile to Lucas' lips as Demon stopped in front of where he sat at the table.

She remained silent for a moment, then asked softly, her voice flat and emotionless, "What do you want, Lucas?"

Lucas waved her into the other chair that stood beside the small table. "You know what I want, Demon. It's time to choose."

He gestured an invitation for Demon to help herself to the food spread across the table, but she ignored him and walked away, moving to the window. As she looked out onto the castle courtyard below, Lucas heard her say softly, "I won't. I can't. None of your choices are acceptable, Lucas. Find another way."

Lucas stood and followed her, moving to lean against the wall by the side of the window, his arms crossed as he looked at her closely. "There's no other way. You know the options. You can give me your son."

Demon shook her head at once. Lucas hid a smile. She didn't know that Marcus was safe. He was almost useless to Lucas now, ruined by the love and attention his parents had lavished on him.

Lucas went on, "Then you can give me another son. We can do it here and now if you like." He waved at a sofa that stood on the far side of the room.

Demon glanced at it and shuddered, her face paling as she shook her head again. "I can't..."

Her voice was barely a whisper, and Lucas found himself growing angry. "You mean you won't. Don't lie to me, Whiplash. You enjoyed it well enough before. I can make it so you'd enjoy it again. Or not." His voice dropped at the last, giving full emphasis to his threat.

Demon turned her head to look at him, and Lucas was startled to see a single tear rolling down her cheek. He hadn't expected that. He'd never have believed he could make this woman cry. She was almost choking as she whispered, "I don't lie, Lucas. I've told you that before. I can't give you a son. I'm unable to have any more children."

Lucas raised an eyebrow in surprise. One thing he'd known from the start was that Demon was fertile. She could conceive easily, and carry easily. That's how he'd known that he'd impregnated her the first time they'd been together. She'd been ripe and ready, and Lucas had enjoyed plowing that furrow, even using Gideon's body to do it. He narrowed his eyes and glared at her. "Did you get yourself fixed? What did you do?"

Before she could move away, Lucas lunged forward, grabbing Demon by the back of her neck and pulling her toward him, laying his other hand flat on her belly. After a second's startled struggle, the tall blonde fell still and let him hold her as he closed his eyes and concentrated.

Sending his senses deep into Demon's body, Lucas was appalled. The medical technology of the regenerators had healed the outer wounds, but internally the damage done to the tall blonde was obvious and horrendous. Tiny scars marked all of her internal organs, showing where they had been replaced. Her uterus was intact, but her ovaries were gone. She had told the truth. She could never give him the son he needed.

Lucas released Demon's neck and stepped back a little, keeping his hand on her belly as he looked into her golden brown eyes and saw the pain there. He chewed his lip again as he asked softly, "Who did this to you?"

Demon dropped her gaze and whispered, "Galen."

Standing in silence, Lucas tried to work out his own feelings as he watched Demon recover her self-control. He was angry of course. Angry at the stupid Technomage for robbing him of one of his chances for an heir. But to his surprise, he found he was also angry at the pain this woman had suffered. She hadn't deserved that. Not from anyone but Lucas Buck.

When the tall blonde finally looked up at him, her eyes once again defiant, Lucas almost smiled. This was how he preferred her. Strong and rebellious, refusing to be cowed or dominated. It was the thing that drew him to Demon and even more so to Angel. They were the only women who ever really stood up to him. He needed that strength for his heir.

Allowing a cruel smile to settle on his mouth, Lucas asked softly, "Would you like me to kill him for

you?"

Demon almost smiled back. Then she shook her head, saying, "No. I want that pleasure for myself one day, and for Matthew." Her head came up, and her face went cold as she went on, "And I don't want to owe you any debts, Lucas Buck. If I want revenge, I'll take it myself."

Lucas shrugged and dropped his hand from her belly, saying, "Suit yourself." He moved back to the table and sat, leaning back and lifting his long legs to rest them on the surface. "Looks like we're left with option three, don't it? Angel will give me the heir I need."

Demon moved quickly across the room, and pushed Lucas' feet off the table. He barely recovered his balance in time to rock forward and place his feet flat on the floor. He looked up to see her eyes had flared into green as she yelled, "Leave my sister alone! Haven't you hurt her enough? Haven't you hurt all of us enough by now? Just leave us alone, Lucas. Leave us alone!"

Lucas leaped to his feet and grabbed Demon's wrists, holding them up in front of him, so she couldn't swing at him. He hissed softly, "Hurt? I told you how much pain I endured when you put me back in that Box. I told you about the pain I felt when Dureena's knife stabbed me in the back. But I never told you about the pain of being locked in that Box, alone, down in the cellars of this castle. I never told you how it felt to be deprived of every sensation, to be blind, deaf and dumb, and to feel nothing. You threw me down into that cellar and you left me there to rot. I owe you a little hurt for that, don't you think?"

Lucas twisted Demon's wrists hard, and pushed her away from him, fighting to keep the Rage under control. When it rose inside him like that, it could make him do things he knew he shouldn't. It could make him kill. Only by controlling it could he use its power.

Demon yelped at the pain in her wrists and backed away from him. Lucas knew that she'd seen the Rage in his eyes, seen the demon that lived inside him peer out at her for a moment, and what she'd seen had frightened her badly. Well, so it should.

As he fought with his internal demon, the tall blonde backed against the wall, saying softly, "They wanted to destroy it. Galen wanted to destroy the Box, but Angel and I stopped him. Were we wrong?"

Lucas won his internal battle, pushing the Rage back down into the deep place within him where it lived, giving him the power he needed. He turned back and faced Demon, again letting a sardonic smile cross his face. "Depends on your point of view, I guess. But if you were going to let me live, you shouldn't have left me down there alone. That was cruel."

It was the truth but it was also a lie. He'd only been alone for a short time before Angel had come to him, drawn to him by the bond he'd created when she'd given herself to him, body and soul. From the moment she'd walked into that cellar, Lucas had created a link with her mind. It hadn't been strong enough to control her or even to communicate with her at first, but it had allowed Lucas to look out of her eyes, to hear with her ears. From that moment, he'd been back in contact with the universe, and that contact has saved his mind. But Demon didn't need to know that.

Demon's face was a picture of regret as she said, "I planned to come and talk to you. I thought I could make contact with you on an emotional level at least. I wanted to help you, but..."

Lucas looked at her in surprise. "But what? What pressing engagement kept you from trying to save my soul?" He couldn't help the sarcasm that crept into his voice, even though he knew she wasn't lying. Demon wasn't the only one could who spot a lie.

The tall blonde looked up at him with haunted eyes, "I found out I was pregnant. I couldn't risk it then.

I knew there was a chance I was carrying your child, and I knew if I came to you then, you'd be able to connect with him, influencing him, turning him into a shadow of yourself. I couldn't let that happen."

Lucas nodded. She was right. That was exactly what would have happened. If he'd had mental contact with Marcus before he was born, then the boy would be a true heir for Lucas. He sneered, saying, "Bad choice. If you'd let that happen then, think how much pain you could have saved your family now."

Demon didn't react in the way he'd expected. Lucas had been sure she'd flare, yelling at him again to leave her family alone. Instead, she stepped toward him, lifting her hand to touch his cheek gently. Lucas found himself taking her hand and gently kissing her palm, although he had no idea why. Somehow, her unexpected gentleness struck a chord in him and made him respond in kind.

The tall blonde said softly, "You don't have to do this, Lucas. You can control it. You know you can. That thing inside you isn't you. You can choose."

Lucas was taken aback, but he kept his feeling from showing on his face. He hadn't expected her to be able to sense the separateness of the two spirits inhabiting his body. But she was wrong, of course. There were no choices, no options left. He had to have an heir and only one person could now give him the son he needed.

Dropping her hand, Lucas nodded. "You're right. I can choose. And I choose..." He paused, long enough to allow Demon's hopes to lift. Long enough to let her believe that she had convinced him. Then he let the cruel smile spread back to his face as he said, "I choose Angel."

Demon kept herself under control as Sol escorted her back to her rooms. She wouldn't allow herself to cry anymore. She would bury the memory of her pleading with Lucas for her sister's life deep down where she'd never have to examine it again. She'd somehow forget that she had fallen to her knees, begging him to let them all go, willing to do whatever he asked in exchange for the safety of her family.

Lucas had laughed at her, telling her that she had nothing to give him any more. Whatever sorrow and sympathy he'd felt earlier in their conversation had vanished, replaced by the cold, calculating fiend she knew so well.

Despite her hatred and fear, Demon couldn't help feeling sorry for the man who lived with the monster that fought for control within Lucas. She knew that man wasn't totally evil. She knew he could feel sympathy and tenderness, but in the end the demon always won, suppressing everything that was good in Lucas.

It was the monster who had taunted her as she'd left, telling her to bring a regenerator and a clean shirt for her husband when she met him for dinner that night, as he'd need both. Demon had leaped at Lucas then, screaming at him, begging him to tell her what he had done to Matthew. Lucas had held her off easily, with that almost inhuman strength he displayed on occasion, telling her that he'd done nothing to Matthew, that any injuries Matthew had suffered had been self-inflicted.

Demon had fallen back, knowing that Lucas had told her the truth. Soon after, Lucas had called Sol, and Demon had accompanied the big man back toward her rooms, wondering how she could get through the day, knowing that Matthew was hurt and in pain somewhere in this castle.

She told herself over and over that she would see him that evening. Lucas had told her that they would

all meet up for dinner. Demon hung onto that thought. In a few hours, she would be with Matthew again. It was the only thing that sustained her.

Her thoughts went out to her sister, wondering where Angel was and what she was doing. What would happen to Angel if she agreed to Lucas' demands? What would happen to them all if she refused? Demon shook her head as she approached the door to her rooms. She had to find a way to suppress her anxieties for her husband and her sister until dinner. Lucas had promised her that she would see both of them. She had to hang on to the fact that Lucas seemed to keep his promises.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes

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