

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

by [The Space Witches](#)



True love needs no words.

Chapter 3

Lily and the children ate breakfast on Demon's terrace, sitting around the table that had remained behind when the sisters had left Eriadne. The children were hungrily attacking the muffins, toast, bacon and eggs, which had been served to them after Demon had left, by yet another one of Lucas' men. They were so absorbed with eating and drinking that hardly a word was spoken.

Even though it smelled and tasted excellent, Lily had hardly touched the food, instead sipping on the freshly brewed tea. She knew that she should eat, that she needed all her energy, but she felt... [Unwell? Odd? Out of sorts? Not quite myself?]

Her head was aching, and despite the pleasant temperature, Lily had to suppress a shiver. She hadn't slept well, and being awoken by that cave troll of a man hadn't helped either. Even now, fragments of unsettling dreams haunted her, eluding her grasp every time she tried to bring them into focus. It was as if her close encounter--[Too close for comfort,] Lily thought--with Lucas had awakened something inside her. Her inner voice told her that she had to remember, that she was missing something important here, but it was useless. [Maybe after some rest.]

But there were too many things to worry about for her to rest. Their Brakiri friends--had Lucas imprisoned them? Killed them? Where was Angel? Was she all right? And where were John, Luke and

Matthew? Lily had repeatedly tried to contact her sister and her telepathic lover, but Lucas' block still made that impossible.

[Please, Mother, let them all be alive and well!] Lily prayed to the Goddess that Lucas would stay true to his word. She had allowed herself to hope last night, but Lucas was a master of manipulation.

Lily rose from her chair, teacup in hand, and moved to stand at the parapet of Demon's terrace. Looking out beyond the castle walls, her eyes took in the view that she hadn't seen in seven years, but that was still as familiar to her as her sisters' faces. A view that should have made her heart swell with happiness, with the warm feeling of being home. What should have been a joyous occasion had turned into a nightmare, because of one man. Lucas Buck.

A flood of mixed emotions threatened to rise inside her, but knowing Marcus would pick up on it, she fought it down. [Lucas!]

The man who had killed Ilas and Dureena's child. The man who had taken Angel from them, and who had hurt their raven-haired sister so much that it had taken her years to recover and start healing. The man who had almost killed John.

[That's the only thing you are able to do, Lucas. Spoil, destroy, hurt and abuse. No pity, no compassion, no love.] Lily feared and hated this man, the monster inside him, with a strength and depth that she had never felt before. And that scared her.

[But don't you hate and fear him all the more, because despite all this, he still has *that* effect on you?] a tiny voice inside her asked. She closed her eyes, unable to deny that truth. The kiss he'd given her the night before had been enough to bring back memories of what he'd done with her, after taking over Matthew's body during the Excalibur's first visit to Eriadne. Lily knew that if she allowed herself to dwell on those memories, they'd be sure to make her nipples harden and her juices flow.

Lily opened her eyes, angrily forcing the thoughts and memories away. She took another sip of tea, followed by a deliberately slow, deep breath. [Enough! I have to stop dwelling on the past, ad nauseam.]

"Wait, Mattie..." Marcus' exclamation, followed by a sudden bumping noise, promptly brought Lily's attention back to the present. When she turned, she could see Mattie sprawled on the floor, next to the chair she'd sat in, tears rising in her eyes. Lily immediately set her cup onto the parapet, rushed over and scooped the little girl up, making soothing noises. She sat Mattie on her lap and started bouncing her gently, inspecting the damage. The girl's right knee was bruised slightly, where she had scraped it on the floor, but her crying seemed to be more a result of shock than of pain. Lily bowed down to blow softly onto the bruise, then asked Faylinn to fetch the regenerator from Demon's bedroom.

"I didn't see she was trying to get down..." Marcus started guiltily, but Dasha interrupted him, blurting out in a voice louder than usual.

"I heard her, Ma!"

Lily gave her son a puzzled look, but after a look around, as if afraid to be overheard, Dasha sent to her through the link, *[I heard her say 'Ouch'. I didn't have my blocks up because...well...I can't feel anything or 'path anyway, but I heard Mattie think, 'Ouch' when she fell!]* His excitement was tangible.

Lily's mind reeled. Could Lucas' block have become weaker, or maybe even gone? Absent-mindedly thanking Faylinn as she took the regenerator from her daughter, Lily ran the instrument over Mattie's knee, while trying to link to Angel. Still nothing, but then the distance was probably just too great, and

the remaining link between the sisters too weak for her to make contact when they were not actually touching.

"Are you all right, darling?" Lily asked Mattie, who had quieted down, and when her niece nodded, she wiped away the tears from her cheeks, kissed the top of her head and put her down on the floor. "Go play, then."

While Mattie settled down among the toys that littered the floor next to the doors, Lily asked Dasha, "Can you link to Aboji?"

Her son concentrated for a few seconds, then shook his head.

Lily thought for a moment, a smile slowly spreading on her lips. She motioned for Marcus and Dasha to come closer, and join her sitting on the floor. Facing Marcus, she asked, "Do you remember when your Daddy got lost on Inesbitrin, before you all left for Earth?" Marcus nodded silently, frowning, obviously trying to figure out what that had to do with anything. "And do you remember what we did to find him?"

Marcus exchanged a look with Dasha, and they both smiled as they looked back at Lily, nodding.

John shifted where he lay on the floor, rolling to face the wall and covering his eyes with his arm to hide from the diffuse light coming from the ceiling. It was Matt's turn to take a few hours' rest on the narrow cot, but to John it didn't make much of a difference whether he lay there or on the floor. The cot wasn't that much more comfortable than the floor, but even if it had been the most comfortable bed in the universe, his mind was too preoccupied to find rest. [And at least down here, I don't feel so alone.]

The feeling of Luke's arm draped loosely across John's waist was familiar and comforting, and maybe listening to the soft rhythm of his lover's breathing would lull him to sleep again. Sending a silent prayer for the safety of the witches and their children to whatever gods or goddesses were willing to listen, John started going through one of the relaxation techniques he'd learned in Teeptown.

He must have drifted off, as he could hear the sound of Matthew and Luke breathing more deeply as they slept, when something suddenly woke him up. Blinking, John tried to figure out what it had been, but all was quiet. Nothing but Matt's and Luke's breathing, the flow and ebb of his lover's sleeping mind as familiar as his own.

All of a sudden, John came wide awake. He could *feel* Luke! And before he was able to follow that realization, he became aware of something at the edge of his mind, something familiar. His mind instinctively latched on to that presence. *[[Lily?]]*

[[Sweet-Face/Aboji/Uncle John!]]

John sat up abruptly, all sleepiness gone as he felt the jubilation of the three joined minds in his head. He was barely aware of Luke pushing himself up on his elbows next to him, murmuring, "What the...", and Matt sitting up on the cot.

"Lily," he mouthed in their general direction, as the voice continued, *[[The block is weakened, for the moment at least. We can't reach Angel; we don't know where Lucas took her.]]*

[[Where are you? Is anyone hurt? What about Demon and Marcus?]] He added the latter as Matt leaned forward, watching him closely.

[[We're all fine, and in Demon's rooms. We tried to get away last night, but Lucas caught us.]]

John gave Matthew a thumbs-up, *They're OK*, before replying, *[[Same here. We're all in one cell now, and we're fine.]]* He couldn't help but smile at the relief he felt from Lily, Dasha and Marcus. John hesitated a moment before continuing--the boys were witnessing this conversation, but there was no time for subtlety, as they didn't know if and when the block would be back in full force. *[[Lucas warned us not to try anything else, or he'd hurt you.]]*

[[Well, that won't stop us,]] was the prompt reply.

[[Lily, don't provoke him. Lucas is a dangerous man.]]

[[We will not sit here idly and let him play his games with us. Demon feels the same.]] John was all too familiar with that tone of voice from Lily, which somehow always conjured up the mental image of a stubborn, red-headed mule. He knew no amount of talking would get her to relent.

[[At least promise me you'll be careful, please!]] Suddenly, something occurred to John. *[[Where is Dem--Lily?]]*

John cursed under his breath. He had lost them. Lucas' block was back in full force.

"So what's your answer, Angel-face?" asked Lucas, as he sauntered into his quarters. He'd considered trying to charm Angel a little when he returned, but considering recent events and his visit with Whiplash, he wanted Angel's answer, and he wanted it now. He was glad to find her awake and standing by the window.

"You ask that as if I have a choice," responded Angel tightly, as she turned to face him.

He had to contain a smile. She was right of course. She didn't really have a choice, but everyone should be allowed to believe in the illusion of freewill. People were easier to control if they believed the decision was theirs.

"Of course you do, darlin'," smiled Lucas.

"The hell I do," snorted Angel. "You already know what my answer will be. So let's stop playing games."

Lucas approached her slowly, the smile disappearing from his face as he said in a soft drawl, "I want to hear you say it."

Angel looked at him defiantly before answering, "Yes, I'll give you what you want. I'll give you an heir."

A slow, satisfied grin spread across Lucas' lips and he reached out to her, intent on drawing her into his arms. His eyes narrowed when she stepped out of his reach and said forcefully, "Don't!"

Lucas had to rein in the Rage, which was still dangerously provoked from his visit with Demon. He'd expected Angel to be rebellious and to fight him a little, but she was beginning to really piss him off. She'd clearly been out of his control for too long.

"Don't?" questioned Lucas. "Considering you've just agreed to be the mother of my child, don't you think holding off goes against our agreement? It's not exactly the attitude I was expecting," he said without amusement.

"Tough, Lucas. You'd better get used to it because that's the way it's going to be until I decide otherwise."

Chewing the inside of his lip, Lucas watched her for a moment. He wasn't enjoying this stronger Angel. If she thought she was going to hold off sleeping with him, she was wrong. Resistance was fun, to a point, but Angel was fast approaching his limit.

"Come again?" asked Lucas, dangerously. He was pleased when he saw her shift nervously.

"I'll do what you want Lucas, but I have a few conditions of my own you have to agree to first," explained Angel.

Lucas raised an eyebrow in question and Angel answered, "Come on, Lucas. You didn't honestly think I'd just fall into your bed with my legs spread, did you? You may be right that I love you and want you, and my body will agree. But I also have a mind. I've changed a lot since the last time you saw me, and if I'm to live with myself, there are some things we have to do *my way*." Angel's voice was controlled and even.

Lucas was beginning to wonder if she'd been taking lessons from her ice-queen sister. [This has Whiplash's controlled stamp all over it.] Lucas wasn't pleased. [Sooner I get her away from her family's meddling the better.] He made a mental note to break this new behavior as soon as possible. Until then, he decided to play along.

"In other words, Angel-face, you want to make a deal?"

"Yes."

Lucas nodded then turned and sat down on the sofa. He leaned back, with his arms spread across the back of the sofa, and crossed one leg over the other. He could see Angel watching him uncertainly. He drew out the silence for a while, knowing it would unsettle her.

Finally he broke the silence. "So, what's the deal?"

He was trying to unsettle her with his relaxed, come-what-may attitude, but Angel knew Lucas wasn't happy. She could see the dangerous look in his eyes. And now he was humoring her with his apparent interest in the deal she wanted to make. But she wasn't going to let that stop her.

"Just because I'm going to give you an heir, doesn't mean I'm just going to fall into bed with you." Angel purposefully ignored the raised eyebrow and continued, "It doesn't matter whether I love you or not. I'm not the same person you think you know. I've experienced what it's like to be loved--*really* loved--respected and cared for. I had a husband who showed me that I deserve more than just sex. I don't expect love from you, Lucas, but I do expect respect and care. I won't settle for anything less. To get me to into your bed and to get what you want, you're first going to have to work for it. You'll have to..." Angel paused, searching for the right word. "You'll have to court me, so to speak."

"This better not be some ploy to delay giving me a child. How do I know you won't just draw it out, darlin'?" asked Lucas, watching her closely.

Angel couldn't hide her grin as she asked, "What's the matter, Lucas? Doubting your ability to charm a woman into your bed?" She watched a lazy, predatory grin spread across Lucas' lips as he sat forward.

"Angel-face, I could charm a virgin saint into my bed. But it's your resistance I'm interested in. Are you

hoping that if you can hold me off long enough, someone will come to your rescue before you get pregnant with my child? If that's the case, you're playing a dangerous game. You know, one way or another, I'll get what I want," warned Lucas, softly.

"I'm not playing a game, Lucas. You'll have me in your bed and you'll have your heir. All I'm asking is that you don't rush things. Is that too much to ask? Would it be such a bad thing to take things slowly? God knows, we may even get to know each other a little, because you know damn well we hardly know a thing about each other right now. And maybe this way I won't feel like I'm just some kind of breeder for you. This way, you can prove to me that you don't just want a baby from me, and that you're not lying when you say you want *me*," finished Angel.

"If that's what you want, love, you've got a deal." Angel was totally taken back by Lucas agreeing so easily with her request. That made her uneasy. She was trying to figure out if he was lying or up to something when he interrupted her thoughts by asking, "What else?"

A little unsure about what was happening, Angel hesitated, doubting if she should continue, but then she decided she had nothing to lose, so she just came out with it. "I'll stay with you, Lucas. I'll give you an heir, but if things don't go well between us, once I've given you your child, I may want to leave you. You have to agree that you won't try to stop me. You'll let me go and you'll never bother me or my family, and you'll never invade my life again." Angel was shaking by the time she got it all out.

Lucas sat watching her, his face unreadable, giving away nothing as to what he was thinking. Angel knew there were certain factors about that part of the deal that she hadn't really given much thought to. Would she *really* be able to leave her baby? Just walk away and let the Rage have its heir without a fight? At that moment, she told herself the baby would never be hers. She would never be a true mother to it, as Demon was to Marcus or as Lily was to Dasha. She would just carry Lucas' son to term and nothing more. She couldn't allow herself to have any feelings for it.

Angel had grave doubts in her ability to just walk away like that, but she couldn't give into them. Nor could she give into the dreams she'd often had about raising a beautiful child of her own, just as her sisters had.

"Do you really think you'll be able to leave your own baby, Angel?" asked Lucas slowly, as if he'd read her mind.

"It won't be mine, Lucas. I won't let it be," answered Angel, feeling her stomach churn at her own cold words.

"Can you do that, Angel? It won't be an 'it' you know. He'll be a boy. Our son." Lucas spoke softly, his eyes holding Angel's prisoner as she shifted uncomfortably.

Finally she snapped, "Yes, I can. Because he won't really be mine, will he Lucas? You'll never really let me have any say in how he'll be raised, or get close enough to influence him in any way. That much I do know. All you want is for me to be the womb that will bring your son to life. You don't want a mother for him."

Again Lucas was silent, watching her so closely that finally she couldn't take it any more because she was starting to doubt herself, and she couldn't let that happen. "So, do you agree or not, Lucas?" She could hear an undercurrent of hysteria in her tone.

"If you believe you can walk away from your own child if things don't work out between us, then fine, darlin'. As long as I have what I want, if you want to leave, I won't stop you," agreed Lucas coldly.

"So, do we have a deal?" asked Angel, her heart contracting painfully. She knew Lucas well and she

knew how he operated. He wouldn't be truly committed until he said it was a deal. One thing she knew she could rely on, having seen Lucas operating on B5. If he made a deal, he stuck to it. [Is it Lucas or the Rage that honors a deal?] She hoped it was both.

Lucas nodded and smiled. "You have a deal."

Yet again, Angel was put on edge by him agreeing so easily, but he'd said the words and she wasn't going to look too deeply at why. Not yet anyway.

"So is that everything?" questioned Lucas, standing.

"Actually, no. There's one more thing," said Angel.

"Really?" asked Lucas, folding his arms and watching her expectantly. Angel watched a muscle in his jaw jump. She knew he was becoming irritated by her demands. But she couldn't stop. This final demand was as important to her as the others. "What now?"

"I want to be able to stay in contact with my sisters,"

"Whoa, Nelly! Not a chance, Angel-face," said Lucas, standing abruptly and cutting Angel off mid-sentence.

"Lucas..." began Angel.

"No. You've got enough out of me today, darlin'. Don't push your luck," he cut in coldly.

"Lucas, you can't cut me off from them!" said Angel desperately, as panic welled up.

"Oh yes, I can."

Angel felt like screaming. "I need my family. You know how important they are to me, Lucas. Please don't take me away from them," she said, reaching out a hand to him, pleading, hoping that the man beneath the Rage would take some pity on her and show another act of kindness.

"I know they mean a lot to you, love. But if you stay in contact with them, they'll know where we are. Flyboy will never rest until he sees me dead. Gotta admire his spirit, but I ain't about to risk it. And I'm sure you understand that if he came after me, I'd have to stop him," Lucas paused to reach out and brush away the tears that had started to fall down Angel's cheeks. "You want me out of their lives, don't you, Angel-face? You don't want your family hurt, do you? If I let you stay in contact with them, and they know where we are, that won't happen. You know that. It's better this way."

Angel didn't want to believe it, or accept it, but what Lucas said made sense. The one thing she wanted was for her family to be safe from him. If she stayed in contact with her sisters, she'd be putting them at risk again. Her heart felt as if it was being torn apart. [Oh my god, how will I survive without them?]

Feelings of panic and dismay came flooding back, threatening to cripple her. She felt like she had all those years ago when Lucas had taken her from Eriadne and she had thought she would never see her sisters again. She wanted to blame Lucas, to hate him for what was happening, but when it came down to it, she knew she was ultimately responsible. She had started all this the moment she'd cast that stupid spell to make Gideon hers, when she had freed Lucas and the Rage instead. She now had a chance to do the right thing for her family, and she couldn't let the prospect of not seeing her sisters again break her resolve. The deal was done and there was no going back.

"I know this is hard for you, love," said Lucas, soothingly.

Angel looked at him and she forced herself to be strong. She squared her shoulders and backed away from him. "No, you don't, Lucas. You'll never know how hard it is. You'll never understand the feelings I have for my family. But you're right, it's better this way." She paused to swallow the painful lump in her throat before she continued, "So, what now?"

"I've arranged for all of us to get together at dinner. You'll get to see your family then. Consider it my way of showing I'm not out to hurt anyone." He paused to smile then went on, "You can tell them at dinner that you'll be staying with me." Angel's eyes widened and Lucas went on, "I think it's best you tell them you're staying, don't you? Of course, I can tell them, if you don't feel up to it."

"No, I'll do it," Angel cut in.

"Good girl." Lucas caressed her cheek. "Don't look so unhappy, love. We're meant to be together, and it'll be good, if you let it." He leaned forward to give her a brief kiss. "Now, I'm sure you need time to think and to calm yourself." He pointed toward the bedroom. "Anything you need to wear for dinner is in there. I've got things to take care of. I'll be back for you later."

Lucas left Angel standing in the middle of the room, trying to calm the raging turmoil within her heart and mind. [How do you know for sure that the Rage controls his actions? You don't even know whether or not Lucas is a willing host to the Rage.]

Angel flinched and tried to drag her thoughts onto something else. She didn't want to think about what it would mean if Lucas had volunteered to host the Rage.

[You know what it means,] said her inner voice.

"No!" whispered Angel, clamping her hands over her ears as if she could shut out the sound of her own conscience.

[Yes, you do. If Lucas was willing then the man you believe he can be--kind and gentle, a man worth loving--doesn't exist and Lucas is probably just as evil as the Rage and just as responsible for all the evil he's done!]

A whimper of distress escaped Angel's lips and she fell onto her knees, "No, I won't believe that. I can't believe that," she cried.

[You have to consider it. If you're going to do this, you have to consider the possibility and be prepared]

"Oh god, please don't let it be that," whispered Angel desperately.

She sat down, willing the chaos and thoughts to subside. Calm returned to her and she stared out the window. Lucas *was* worth loving. The Rage was a parasite that had taken over his body. He hadn't been willing and he wasn't that bad. Angel kept repeating the words to herself, until finally she silenced her doubts. She could only survive this if her promise to keep her family safe from the Rage was strengthened by the belief that Lucas was worth loving. Lucas wasn't the enemy. The Rage was.

Lucas sat in the library, brooding on his meeting with Angel, and its implications for the future. He'd left her abruptly, not because he had any particular business to take care of, but because he'd felt the Rage rising within him again. Demon had triggered its arousal that morning, and now it wouldn't go away. Lucas was having to struggle harder to control it than he had in years. [Damn that woman for getting to me!]

He still wasn't sure how she had affected him so strongly. Was it her pain at having to admit to him

that she was unable to carry his child? The damage that had been done to her in Galen's attack? Or was it her anger that had roused the sleeping Rage? Not that it really mattered. What was important was that Lucas had to get it under control before he saw any of the other members of Angel's family. If he didn't, he might just kill one of them, and that wouldn't be very helpful.

Allowing himself a moment to dwell on the pleasurable memory of his plan to set a fire in the cell block, Lucas sighed as he regretfully dismissed the idea, accepting that he had to change tactics. Angel's new found strength and resolution had taken him by surprise, and he now needed a plan to deal with it. If he was going to have to charm Angel into his bed, he decided he may just as well start by getting on her good side. And the best way to do that was to be nice to her family.

Gritting his teeth at the idea of being generous to Flyboy, Lucas pushed himself to his feet and strode out of the library, whistling softly to himself.

The sound of the door being flung open startled Demon and broke the merge she had been trying to create with Lily, Marcus and Dasha, while Faylinn, Naima and Mattie were playing on the terrace outside. The four of them with mental powers were sitting cross-legged in a circle on the floor, holding hands and linking minds, as Lucas burst into the room. They had been trying to gather the strength for a sleeping spell that would affect every inhabitant of the castle, allowing the sisters and their children to escape. They had then planned to go to the cell block, rouse their men, collect Angel and flee to their shuttle before anyone else in the castle awoke.

When Demon had returned to her rooms, Lily had at once told her older sister of her contact with John and the plan she had come up with in the tall blonde's absence. Demon had privately thought they had little chance of pulling off such a powerful spell, but she had agreed to try, doing her utmost to bind the minds of Lily and the two boys into a merge, as she had once done so effortlessly with her sisters.

The tall blonde looked up fearfully as the man who looked so like her husband, yet so unlike, stared down at the four of them on the floor, shaking his head in amusement.

"Nice try, ladies, but it would never have worked. I could sense what you were up to halfway across the castle."

Demon wondered whether he was telling the truth, or whether it was just chance that he had interrupted them. There was no way to tell for sure. She uncrossed her legs and lifted herself to her feet, moving to stand between Lucas and the others, trying to defend them from him, like a mother cat trying to protect her kittens. She knew it was useless, and that she was facing the equivalent of a full-grown male tiger, but she had to try.

"What do you want now, Lucas? I thought we wouldn't have the pleasure of your company again until dinner." Demon allowed the full weight of her sarcasm to show in her voice. Goading Lucas was dangerous, but she refused to let him see her fear again.

Lucas gave one of his most charming smiles in return. "I can give you a lot more pleasure than just my company, Whiplash, any time you like. Just say the word." His eyes shifted to Lily and he quirked an eyebrow lasciviously. "One after the other or both at the same time, if you prefer."

Demon tensed, hoping the two boys didn't understand the implications of what Lucas had just offered. A quick check with her empathic powers told her that the children felt only puzzlement at the conversation going on above their heads—literally and euphemistically. What was more interesting was that Lucas was not as relaxed as he appeared.

While his casual stance--thumbs hooked into his pockets, feet spread wide, and a wry smile on his face--gave every indication of a man who felt completely at ease and in control, Demon could sense an undercurrent of anger and frustration. She decided to tread more carefully. She didn't want to arouse the Rage that lived within him again. Not with the children present.

Forcing a smile to her face, Demon shook her head and chuckled softly. "In your dreams, Lucas." She waved a hand toward one of the sofas, inviting Lucas to sit, while sending a thought to Marcus through their link. *[[Will you go out onto the terrace with Dasha and make sure the girls are OK? Thank you, darling.]]*

Marcus got to his feet, and pulled Dasha up with him, leading his cousin silently out onto the terrace. Lily paused, gave Demon a significant look, and then followed the two boys, leaving the tall blonde alone with their adversary.

Lucas sat on the white sofa, lifting one leg to cross the other, resting his ankle on his knee and leaning back into the cushions. He smiled up at Demon, saying, "So it's going to be one at a time, is it? And don't tell me that *you've* never dreamed about it. That first time was pretty damned memorable."

Demon ignored his comment and hurriedly suppressed the memories that his words provoked. She sat on the opposite sofa, well out of reach, and forced another smile to her face, shaking her head. "Never you mind what I dream about, Lucas. What is it you want from us?"

Lucas' Rage was calming, and the anger draining out of him as he sat casually, looking relaxed and sexy as hell. Demon couldn't deny his physical attraction, much as she would like to. How could she not be attracted to him when he looked so much like her husband? As long as she ignored everything she knew about him, she could almost pretend that Lucas was a charming man. Almost.

"A couple of things this time, darlin'. But don't worry. These are easy, and you'll be happy with the result. I want a regenerator and one of your husband's shirts. Of course, if you'd like to remove that one you're wearing, and give it to me, I wouldn't complain too much." Lucas gave a small smile and a wink.

Demon forced down a shudder and gave another small chuckle. "As I said, in your dreams. Why do you want them?" Lucas was up to something with his smooth charm and good humor, Demon was sure of that.

He sat forward on the sofa, and his smile was replaced by a look of concern. "Your husband hurt his hands trying to get out of his cell, and he tore up his shirt for bandages. He's in with the doc and the teep now, so if I take them a regenerator, Harvard can fix Flyboy right up, and I'm sure he'd be glad to get a shirt on his back again."

Demon stood abruptly and walked into the bedroom without saying another word. She was suspicious of Lucas' motives but if it would help Matthew, she would do as Lucas asked. She bent over to remove the regenerator from the bag where Lily had replaced it after healing Mattie's sore knee, then moved to a wardrobe to take out one of Matthew's shirts. As she did so, a voice came from the bedroom doorway.

"Well now, Whiplash. The sight of that bed brings back a few interesting memories."

Demon turned abruptly, to see Lucas standing in the doorway, his arms spread so that his hands rested on either side, a lustful smile on his face. He was blocking Demon's exit, as he moved his eyes from her to the bed and back again.

The tall blonde froze in place, this time unable to resist the almost overwhelming memories of the hours

she had spent in that bed with Lucas. He had been occupying Matthew's body at the time of course, but it was still Lucas who had fucked her repeatedly in that bed. Lucas who had spanked her, and lifted her to orgasm again and again, until she could stand it no more and she had fainted, with him still inside her.

The way he was looking at her made Demon wonder if he was about to do the same again. His eyes were narrowed and he chewed at the inside of his lip. Lucas had never looked so predatory as he did at that moment.

The tension between them was broken by the sound of the doors to the terrace banging open, and Mattie's screams.

"I want my Daddy! I want my Daddy!" The little girl wailed her demands, and Demon moved forward quickly, dropping the shirt and regenerator she held in her hands onto the bed, ready to push Lucas out of her way, to get to her daughter.

It proved unnecessary as Mattie threw herself at the back of Lucas' legs, banging her tiny fists into his thighs as she screamed for her father over and over. Lucas moved aside rapidly, and Demon almost laughed when she saw him move his hands quickly to protect his crotch. Having felt the impact of Mattie's fist first on his nose and now on his legs, he was obviously wary of her landing a blow on any more vulnerable parts of his anatomy.

Demon rushed forward and lifted her daughter into her arms, trying to calm her screams, but Mattie was beyond calming. The two year old was having a full blown temper tantrum, and her screams only increased in volume until they became almost painful to endure.

Lucas obviously found them so, as after a few moments he yelled, "Can't you shut her up? That is the most god-awful noise I've ever heard."

Demon struggled with her hysterical child and yelled back, "There are only two things that can quiet her when she's like this. One is her father, the other is time. If she doesn't see Matthew, she'll scream like this until she exhausts herself, then she'll fall asleep." It wasn't the first time Mattie had thrown a tantrum like this, and Demon had learned to grit her teeth and live through them. She became aware that Lily and the other children had followed Mattie into the living room, and they were all standing in a huddle in the doorway, hands over their ears as Mattie wailed.

Lucas shook his head and looked as if he'd like to block his own ears, but instead, he marched up to Demon and put his hand on Mattie's chin, pulling her head around to face him.

"Quit it! Or I'll give you something to scream about!"

Mattie screwed up her little face, going bright red as she held her breath for a moment of blessed silence, then let go with a louder scream than all those she had given so far.

"Oh, thank you very much! You obviously have a lot of experience with hysterical children, Lucas!" Demon's annoyance and concern for her daughter made her reckless, but to her surprise, Lucas started to laugh.

"I should have known better than to threaten a woman of this family. It doesn't work on any of you. Just makes you worse in fact. This little one is definitely her mother's daughter."

Lucas gave Demon a charming grin, then pulled Mattie's face around toward him again. "OK, you win. I'll bring your Daddy to see you, if you stop screaming right now."

Mattie stopped abruptly, cutting herself off in mid-scream. She was still very red in the face, and tear marks tracked her cheeks, but she sniffed noisily and whimpered, "Daddy?"

Lucas nodded, patting the little girl's golden curls. "Yes, Daddy. But you have to stop screaming now. Do we have a deal?"

To Demon's amazement, Mattie nodded seriously and stayed silent, her thumb creeping to her mouth to suck in solace. Somehow her daughter sensed that Lucas was telling the truth. Demon watched as he walked back into the bedroom and picked up the regenerator and shirt she had dropped when Mattie had burst in. Turning back, Lucas looked at Demon and Mattie and smiled again.

"I'll take these to him now, and as soon as he's fixed up, I'll bring him back here. OK?"

Lucas turned and walked toward the door, then paused as Dasha spoke up from the doorway to the terrace. "What about our Dad? And Aboji?"

Demon was surprised to sense genuine regret from Lucas as he said, "Sorry, kid. You'll get to see them again later. For the moment, I need them to stay right where they are." Lucas glanced over at Demon, and she knew exactly what he had left unsaid. John and Luke were still hostages for the good behavior of their family.

Lucas went on. "You can see them after dinner. And while I'm on the subject, dinner is an adult only affair. No kids." He paused, but before Demon and Lily could object, he went on, "Except for Marcus. He can join us. I'll send babysitters for the other kids."

Lily rushed forward, saying, "Forget it, Lucas! We're not leaving our children in the care of your men. How stupid do you think we are?"

Lucas laughed softly. "Why don't you wait until you see who the babysitters are before I answer that question?"

Then he was gone, moving so fast it appeared he had vanished.

Demon looked over her daughter's head at Lily, who stared back in surprise.

"Who do you think he'll send, Demon? Could it be...?" Lily's voice trailed off, but Demon knew what hopes had surged into her little sister's mind.

"Don't get your hopes up, Lily. He could have meant anything. Now," she turned her attention to Mattie, who was still silently sucking her thumb, "let's get your face washed. You don't want your Daddy to see you all dirty, do you?"

Demon carried Mattie into the bathroom, trying to quell her excitement. Matthew was coming back to her. Matthew was coming back.

Gideon lay on his back on the bunk, staring at the ceiling, trying to ignore the burning pain in his hands. He'd said nothing to Luke, but the pain had been getting steadily worse since the three of them had been confined in the cell together, and Gideon was becoming concerned that he'd done some serious damage to his fingers, which he could now hardly move.

When Luke and John had both fallen asleep a few hours earlier, Gideon had taken the opportunity to carefully unwind the cloth from his left hand, and examined the wounds. It wasn't pretty. The fingertips were cracked, red and black, not actually bleeding, but weeping a transparent liquid that

had seeped into the makeshift bandages. Peeling the cloth back had been excruciating, and Gideon had hurriedly covered the mess again, and tried not to think about what damage the delay in treating his hands might be causing. Luke had said nothing, but Gideon knew he was worried.

John's brief link with Lily a short while before had at least relieved the tedium of their captivity and provided Gideon with much needed reassurance that his wife and children were unharmed, but he was becoming more and more restless in the cell. It was only consideration for John and Luke, who sat on the floor together, that prevented Gideon from pacing back and forth, like a caged animal. Which was exactly how he felt.

If he'd been alone, he'd have been pacing, banging the door, howling his frustration at whoever might be outside listening, but he wasn't alone. So Gideon kept himself under control and lay on the bunk, staring at the ceiling, wondering if they would ever get out of this cell, and if he would ever see Deborah and the children again.

The sound of the lock rattling disturbed Gideon's depressing thoughts, and he leaped to his feet as the door opened. Luke and John quickly joined him, starting to move toward the open doorway, as Lucas appeared and blocked their path.

"Easy there, boys. You ain't going anywhere yet for awhile." Lucas grinned, and waved one hand out into the corridor behind him. Immediately, Sol appeared at his shoulder, pointing a gun at the men in the cell.

Gideon waved John and Luke back, but took a step toward Lucas, saying, "So why are you here, Lucas? Are you doing room service yourself now? Running short of staff?" He carefully plastered a sardonic grin on his face, unable to resist the opportunity to needle his captor.

Lucas shook his head and snorted. "Now, that's stupid, Fly-boy. I came down here to do you a kindness, and you're just downright ungrateful."

Gideon sneered back. "What sort of kindness had you planned for us this time? Maybe moving us to a cell with a view?"

He was completely taken aback when Lucas held out a regenerator and one of Gideon's shirts, which he had been holding behind his back until that moment. Gideon looked from the objects Lucas held up to the other man's face, as Lucas said quietly, "I got these from your wife. You might want the doc to fix you up before I take you back to your family."

Gideon narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "OK, Lucas, what's the deal? What's in it for you?" He couldn't believe that Lucas was doing this out of the kindness of his heart. He wasn't sure Lucas *had* a heart.

As he spoke, Luke moved forward and took the regenerator from Lucas, passing the shirt back to John as he started to unwind the bandages from Gideon's hands. Gideon did his best to ignore the pain this caused, keeping his attention focused on Lucas while the doctor worked.

Lucas gave a pained smile. "Such ingratitude, Fly-boy. Can't a man do another man a kindness without being suspected of having an ulterior motive?" Gideon shook his head and Lucas laughed, continuing, "OK, you got me. This is pure self-interest. That daughter of yours is screaming the whole damned castle down, and I'm told that you're the only one who can quiet her. She makes the most god-awful noise I ever heard, so the arrangement is, I take you back to your family, and you shut her the hell up. Deal?"

Gideon couldn't help but smile. He knew how Mattie could scream when she was having a temper tantrum, and he knew that when she got like that, he was the only one who could calm her. He and

Deborah had learned that the hard way. It was interesting to find that Lucas would succumb to Mattie's shrieks. As far as Gideon knew, she was the only person in his experience who had ever got Lucas to back down. He wondered if he might be able to use that knowledge in the future. It wasn't difficult to get Mattie to scream her head off. She wasn't exactly what anyone would call a docile child.

The only question was whether Lucas was telling the truth. Did he really want Gideon to calm Mattie? Or maybe this was a ploy to get him to go quietly, while they took him somewhere they could kill him silently and without witnesses. Gideon told himself that if Lucas had wanted to do that, he'd had plenty of opportunity when Gideon had been alone in a cell of his own.

Nodding his head, Gideon said, "Deal. What about John and Luke?"

Luke had been working quietly on Gideon's left hand, and the retired Captain suddenly realized that for the first time in hours, he felt no pain from it. He glanced down and saw that the regenerator had done its job, closing the deep gashes, and turning the flesh on the fingertips back to pink, healthy tissue. He flexed his fingers carefully, and sighed in relief as Luke started to unwind the bandages from his right hand, knowing that soon the pain would be gone from there, too.

Lucas shook his head, "They stay here. They're hostages for your good behavior, Fly-boy. I may be going soft in my old age, but I ain't stupid. I still don't trust you, and I don't expect you to trust me. Let's leave it at that."

Gideon decided it made sense. He moved his right hand slightly as Luke was treating it, making the doctor look up at him. "Luke, I'm sorry." Turning his head toward John, who had been silently watching the exchange, he added, "If I thought you could quiet Mattie..." He trailed off, not wanting to lie to his friend. Even if John or Luke *had* been able to calm Mattie down, would he have asked Lucas to let them go in his place? Would he have been able to sacrifice a chance to be with Deborah and the children? He didn't want to know the answer to that question.

John smiled gently back at him, saying, "It's OK, Matt. It's only for another few hours." He turned and looked at Lucas, raising an eyebrow in query. "Isn't it? You said earlier we'd be reunited with our families at dinner. Is that still the deal?"

Lucas nodded, "You'll get to see Lily again then, although you'll have to wait until a little later to see your kids. I don't want a hoard of rug-rats running around at dinner, so they'll stay in Demon's rooms, with babysitters." He raised his hands to stop the other men's objections. "Don't *you* start. Your women have made it clear they won't leave the kids with anyone they don't trust. Why don't you just leave the decision to them?"

Gideon decided that made sense, too, but there was one person whose name hadn't been mentioned. He had to ask. "And Angel? Will we see her at dinner?"

Lucas smiled, and Gideon could almost feel the satisfaction oozing out of his opponent, as he said softly, "Oh, yeah. Angel will be there. She has something to tell you all, so she'll be the guest of honor."

Gideon wondered what his doppelganger was up to. He had his suspicions, but before he could confirm them, Lucas looked at Luke and demanded, "Ain't you done yet, Harvard?"

Luke nodded and moved away. Gideon looked down at his hands, which were now somewhat pink, where the new skin had grown over the gashes and wounds, but they felt fine. He flexed his fingers gently, listening as Luke advised him to be careful with his hands for a few hours until the skin toughened.

Ignoring Lucas' impatient toe-tapping in the doorway, Luke moved to the bed, picking up the shirt that

John had dropped there, and held it out to Gideon. The retired Captain laughed. "I can dress myself, Luke."

The doctor shook his head and smiled. "Not just yet. I'll get the buttons for you. No doubt Demon will be glad to unfasten them for you later."

Gideon laughed again, allowing Luke to finish fastening his shirt, then turned to Lucas and said, "OK, let's go see if I can get my daughter quieted down."

He followed Lucas out of the cell, wondering if Lucas had told him the truth, or whether he was being taken somewhere where they could put a bullet in his head.

Lucas walked at Gideon's shoulder, just half a pace behind him, careful not to put his own body between his captive and Sol, who followed them with his gun held ready to shoot. Lucas didn't underestimate Gideon. He knew what the other man was capable of, having spent so many years inside Gideon's head, watching his every action, hearing his thoughts. He knew Gideon wasn't stupid, and he knew Gideon would be suspicious.

Well, on this occasion, Lucas was playing it reasonably straight. But that didn't mean he couldn't have a little fun along the way, and further his own agenda at the same time.

Gideon led the way through the hallway where many of the tapestries still hung that had been created by the sisters during their years of residency in the castle. Lucas touched Gideon's arm, bringing him to a halt in front of the tapestry showing Demon and Angel being abducted by the Vorlon.

It was a beautiful picture, showing both women deeply asleep, each of their limp bodies draped across the arm of a white, glowing, beautiful creature; the appearance Lucas knew the Vorlon had taken to deceive the younger races.

Looking at the women's faces in the tapestry, Lucas realized how little either had aged since that time. A quick calculation told him they were now both around fourteen years older than they had been when they were abducted, but the years had been kind to them. Angel still looked younger than thirty, although if she had been eighteen at the time of her abduction, she must be over that age now. Shifting his eyes to the image of Demon, Lucas had to admit that she didn't show her age either. She must now be in her late thirties, but she didn't look it.

Lucas watched as Gideon lifted his hand to Demon's image and gently touched her face. It was obvious that his thoughts had followed the same lines as Lucas', when he said quietly, "She's hardly aged at all since this tapestry was made. The Vorlon said they'd age normally once it hibernated, but I think it lied."

Lucas didn't understand the comment about the Vorlon and hibernation, but he knew the aliens had tampered with the women's genetic structures, bringing out their latent psychic abilities. It hadn't occurred to him before that other changes might have been made. He was well aware that the Vorlon were capable of many things impossible to even twenty-third century human technology, but could they slow the aging processes in humans? Quite possibly. He dismissed the idea as irrelevant.

Time to play.

Reaching out his own hand to touch the image of Angel's beautiful face, Lucas said in his most sincere voice, "I know you don't trust me, Matt, but there's one thing about me you should trust. The way I feel about Angel."

Gideon turned and looked at Lucas, the full weight of his skepticism apparent in his face. "And just how *do* you feel about her, Lucas? You've probably hurt her more than anyone else in this galaxy. Just what feeling is that supposed to prove?"

Lucas kept his face serious, quelling the temptation to bite back at Gideon. "I took care of her when she was with me. When we lived on Babylon 5 together, I made sure she wanted for nothing. I gave her everything she needed and desired. It was only when you took her away from me that things went badly for her."

It was true up to a point. He had taken care of Angel, gave her clothes and jewels, made love to her, made her happy. Until that stupid test. Until he hadn't trusted her and had decided to check her loyalty. Lucas would never forgive himself for what had happened to Angel as a result, when she had been badly beaten and nearly raped as a result of his stupidity. It was after that when Angel had contacted Gideon and warned him of Lucas' plans to abduct her pregnant sister, leading to Lucas' wounding and capture. He still had the scar on his back from that incident, but Lucas knew he'd brought Angel's betrayal upon himself, which was why he had forgiven her. Shaking his head free of uncomfortable memories, Lucas lifted his hand and touched the image of Angel's face again, whispering, "I just want her to be happy."

It was a show for Gideon, of course, but deep down, Lucas knew there was the tiniest element of truth in his words. He did want Angel to be happy, but she was only allowed to be happy with him. Gideon's next words reinforced that determination.

"She was happy for a while. Just for a few months. When she was married to Michael Healy."

Lucas had to fight down the Rage that threatened to overwhelm him at the mention of that name. Michael Healy, the man who had dared to marry Angel. The man who Lucas had hired an assassin to kill. No other man was allowed to be with his Angel. No one else was allowed to make her happy.

Allowing none of his inner turmoil to surface, Lucas said softly, "I know. I heard about that. I want to try and make her happy again."

Well aware of the suspicious look Gideon was giving him, Lucas dropped his hand from the tapestry, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Your family is waiting. Let's move."

He waved Gideon to lead the way out of the hallway, containing his irritation at how the exchange had progressed. Somehow, the last few minutes hadn't gone the way that he'd planned. Somehow the tables had been turned on him, making him think things he didn't want to think, feel things he didn't want to feel. How had that happened? Lingering for one last moment to touch the image of Angel's face again, Lucas refused to answer his own question.

Gideon walked through the door into Deborah's rooms, and a small, blonde missile hurled itself at him, shrieking, "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

Sweeping his daughter up into his arms, Gideon kissed her gently on the forehead, then turned to his wife and son, who had been hanging back, waiting for him to calm Mattie before they approached. He held out his hand, and Marcus came running to him, hugging him fiercely, then holding onto his free hand tightly.

When his son looked up at him, Gideon could see that Marcus had been fighting his fears, trying to be strong for his sister and mother, trying to be the man of the family during his father's absence. Gideon pulled his son to his side and gave him another hug, wordlessly reassuring him that everything was

going to be all right. He did his best to send out waves of love and confidence, knowing that Deborah and Marcus at least would pick up on them and feel reassured.

Holding his children tightly in his arms, Gideon turned to Lucas and said, "Thank you. So what happens next?"

Ever since their conversation in the hall of tapestries, Gideon had been hanging onto his temper. He'd played it calm, suppressing the rage that made him want to scream accusations at Lucas, calling him a murderer and assassin. Gideon knew all too well that Lucas had been responsible for Michael Healy's death, but the retired Captain had decided that he would keep that knowledge from Lucas, as he had kept it from his family. Gideon wanted to be sure that Angel would never find out why Michael Healy had died, as he knew that the knowledge would devastate her. So he swallowed his anger and kept his knowledge to himself, keeping his voice even as he thanked Lucas and asked his question.

Lucas nodded an acknowledgement and glanced over at Lily, who stood by the doors to the terrace, with her three children standing beside her. "You'll all get to meet up again at dinner. Angel has something to tell you, then we can work out where we go from there. If everyone stays calm and behaves themselves, this will all be over by morning, and we can go our separate ways. No fuss, no muss. OK?"

Turning on his heel, Lucas strode out of the room, banging the door shut behind him.

Gideon hugged his children hard again, then carefully lowered Mattie to the floor, saying, "I want you two to stay with your Auntie Lily for a few minutes. I need a moment with your mother." He looked up at where Deborah stood, holding herself rigidly, her face an impassive mask. He knew the feelings she was holding back. They were the same as his.

Marcus nodded and reached out to take Mattie's hand. The little girl started to whine, but Gideon gave her another hug, kissed her again, and told her he wouldn't be long. Then he straightened and held out his hand to his wife.

Deborah stepped forward and took his hand, following as he led her into the bedroom. As the door closed behind them, Gideon spun his wife around and took her into his arms, almost crushing her against him. He felt her arms going around his neck and she squeezed him tightly. Neither spoke as the intensity of Deborah's love and relief swept through them.

After a few seconds of standing silently, reveling in the warmth of his wife's touch, the softness of her body against his, the scent of her hair, and most of all, the depth of her love for him, Gideon lifted his head and took her mouth with his.

The kiss seemed endless, until Gideon started to feel dizzy from lack of oxygen, and he pulled away and smiled.

"Hello."

He didn't need to say anything more, as that one word held everything he felt for Deborah. Gideon watched as tears welled up in her eyes, but she pulled herself together, put a brave smile on her face and said, "Hello to you, too. I want to throw you on that bed and show you just how much I've missed you, but I think we have about thirty seconds before Mattie starts screaming for her Daddy again. I think we'd better go back now."

Gideon nodded, lifting Deborah's hand to kiss it gently, turning it over to kiss the palm, as he whispered, "I love you."

Then he held onto her hand as he walked back to the bedroom door and opened it, to rejoin the rest of his family.

Lucas sauntered down the corridor, a self-satisfied smile on his face. Everything was falling into place. He'd set all the players in motion, and they were reacting just as he wanted. Most importantly, Angel was going to give him what he wanted. An heir. An heir born from his genes and Angel's. A force to be reckoned with, even without the Rage enhancing his power.

The smile faded, as he thought about Angel's deal. His girl had changed in the years since she'd been away from his control and influence. Her new strength was going to be a nuisance, but it didn't worry him too much. [You want me to court you, darlin? Well, I'm going to woo the pants off you. Literally.]

The smile returned at the thought of the many ways he'd charm Angel, and how she'd be unable to resist. He knew Angel would try, but he knew she'd cave in. Love could be an annoying thing, but it could also be useful. It made people stupid and weak. Angel wouldn't be able to deny what her heart and body wanted. Him.

As Lucas headed towards the large kitchen to give orders for the dinner that evening, he thought about the other part of her deal. That he should let her leave once she'd given him his heir. A twisted smirk replaced the satisfied grin. He'd only agreed to that condition because he knew she'd never be able to leave him. Love would hold her captive. Nor would she be able to leave her own baby, even if she felt the child wasn't really hers. She was right, of course. Lucas would never allow Angel to influence his child, poisoning its mind with good intentions, as her sister had done with Marcus.

Everything was falling into place. It hadn't been as easy as he'd thought, but Lucas had everything under control. Once he got Angel away from the smothering control of her family, and kept their goodie-two-shoes influence from her, she'd be all his. [Body and soul.]

Reaching the kitchen, Lucas pushed open the large, carved wooden doors. A feeling of pleasure ran through him as the Brakiri kitchen staff looked up and became skittish in his presence. He explained what he wanted arranged for that evening and then sauntered out, leaving in his wake scared caterers, rushing to get things prepared for the evening

He was looking forward to dinner. It was going to be highly entertaining.

For him.

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