

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

by The Space Witches



Marcus has inherited much from his mother and father.

Chapter 1

Lucas left the cell block whistling softly to himself. His meeting with Gideon had gone about as well as he'd expected. He'd never really imagined that the retired Captain would collapse into a blubbing heap when confronted by his old enemy, but it had been a delicious fantasy. Now Lucas had to deal with the reality.

It had been extremely enjoyable to find out that Demon had never told her husband about her little encounter with Lucas on Ceti Gamma IV. When he thought about it, Lucas didn't find it so surprising. Demon could keep her mouth shut, and she didn't feel the need to share every thought and feeling. He liked that in a woman.

He gave a little sigh as he thought how much easier life would have been if Gideon had died on Centauri Prime, like he was supposed to. It had taken a long time and a lot of effort for Lucas to set up that trap, dealing through his contacts inside the Centauri Empire, getting suggestions made in the highest levels of the Centaurum, so that the Excalibur would be lured to the capital, and Batman and Robin could be captured and executed. Lucas still wasn't quite sure how Gideon had escaped, but it pissed him off when he thought about it. Fly-boy had one hell of a nerve comparing *Lucas* to a cockroach, when he was just as difficult to kill himself.

Fond memories of that plan drifted through Lucas' mind as he walked through the castle. It should have ended with Demon and Angel returning to Earth, taking Marcus with them. Once there, alone and vulnerable, it wouldn't have taken Lucas long to arrange for an 'accident' to befall Demon, leaving Angel and Marcus bereft, just ripe to be plucked from their sad state by

Lucas. He'd have taken them to his home on Regula IV, where he'd have lived happily, [Well, I'd have been happy, at least,] with Angel as his partner, raising Marcus as his son.

It had been such a perfect plan. Lucas sighed again. Why the hell couldn't Fly-boy have just had the sense to die when he was supposed to? Now the task facing Lucas was much more difficult. Getting Marcus away from two parents who were alive and kicking would be a real challenge. If Lucas wanted to dispose of both Gideon and his wife, it would have to be in an accident convincing enough to fool both Angel and Marcus, and that wouldn't be easy. That wasn't to say it would be impossible. Accidents did happen, and quite frequently around Lucas.

He mulled over in his mind what might be arranged. First he'd need to get Gideon and Demon together, which wasn't something that particularly appealed to him, but if it was necessary, Lucas could make that sacrifice. It was still completely beyond him what Demon saw in Gideon. OK, he was a fine looking man--well, apart from his lousy taste in clothes and haircuts--he couldn't help being that, as he was identical to Lucas. But beyond his looks? Fly-boy was just too good, too honorable, too guilt ridden to be any fun at all. What Whiplash needed was a *real* man. Lucas thought back fondly on his memories of the one time he'd been with the tall blonde. He may have been using Gideon's body at the time, but he'd given her the ride of her life.

Lucas shook those thoughts away as a distraction. It may be a waste, but Demon had to die in a tragic accident with her husband. Maybe a fire in the cell block? Just at the time he generously allowed Demon to visit with Fly-boy. That would take care of the teep and the doc, too. The thought of all of them going up in flames was very satisfying. Lucas laughed softly, thinking that Gage Temple hadn't been a total idiot. He'd had the right idea when he'd set that fire at the old Trinity Guardian offices and burned the Emorys to death. [Ah, the good old days of Trinity.] For a moment, Lucas felt almost nostalgic for his old life on Earth, when he had run his town, controlled his people, and decided who would live and who would die. On thinking further, nothing had changed much after all.

Arriving in the corridor leading to Demon's rooms, Lucas started to whistle softly again. He decided he'd meet and talk to Marcus first, before finalizing his plans for the disposal of the boy's parents. If the kid was a wash out, then Lucas would change the focus of his attack, and go all out for Angel. Not that he had any intention of leaving Eriadne without her anyway.

Lucas nodded to the guard to unlock the door, and then strode into the large white room.

Demon span around quickly as the lock of the door rattled. She quickly placed herself between the door and the sofa, blocking the line of sight between anyone entering and where Lily sat. This gave Lily the seconds she needed to push the paper and crayon she'd borrowed from Marcus' bag down the side of the sofa, hiding the spell on which she was working.

When she saw the man who walked through the door, Demon locked herself under control, refusing to let loose the fear and panic she experienced. She couldn't let Lily and the children know how much this man frightened her. The children were still playing in the bedroom, but Demon knew that Marcus would still be able to sense her fear through their link if she lost control.

As she looked at Lucas standing in front of her, the merest hint of a smile playing around his

sensual mouth, Demon asked herself who she was more afraid of: Lucas or herself? This man was the murderer of Dureena's child, he had kidnapped Angel, he had tried to kidnap Demon herself, and she knew that if he'd succeeded, as soon as her son was born, he would have murdered her. Yet despite all that, she couldn't help but be attracted to him.

It wasn't just his almost complete physical resemblance to Matthew. It was more than that. It was the charm and humor Demon could sense within Lucas. It was the man who co-habited that body with the Rage that drove him to his most despicable acts. A man who had many things in common with Demon's husband, who she loved completely and unreservedly. And it was the sheer sensual magnetism of the man. He seemed to drip sex appeal from every pore. At that moment, Demon completely understood her sister's obsession with Lucas.

Everything about him begged to be touched. His clothes were silk and suede; a blue-green silk shirt under a tan suede vest that made Demon's fingers twitch with desire to run them over the soft textures. His hair, which he wore longer than Matthew ever did, shone in the sunlight pouring through the windows, auburn highlights glinting through the soft waves of darker brown. Lucas had none of the grey hairs that now showed clearly on Matthew's head.

Demon suppressed the urge to lift her hand and run it through those soft locks. She clamped down on every emotion, barely aware that Lily had come to stand by her side, providing moral support.

Lucas gave a lazy smile as he nodded his head, saying, "Ladies. You both look as beautiful today as when I last saw you. Looking at the two of you, I'd never have believed so many years had passed."

Demon smiled coldly. "I could say the same of you, Lucas. It seems that even the passage of time can't bear to touch you."

Lucas gave a small snort of amusement. "Ah, Whiplash. You should save that mouth of yours for more interestin' activities. You might cut yourself with a tongue like that." He moved across to the sofa, sitting himself casually where Lily had sat a moment before. Then he lifted one leg and rested his ankle on his other knee, staring up at the two women, completely relaxed as he went on, "And you want to be nice to me, you know? I was about to tell the two of you that you could go visit your men, but maybe I'll change my mind if you ain't polite."

Demon overcame a moment of panic as she saw that Lucas had seated himself right next to the cushion concealing Lily's work. To cover her fear, she sneered down at him, refusing to allow herself to believe what Lucas was saying, even though she could sense he was telling the truth. Had she just thrown away her only chance of seeing Matthew again, by annoying Lucas? But he didn't feel annoyed. Even with her limited powers, Lucas only seemed to be leaking satisfaction, not anger.

"What do you want, Lucas? You've gone to a lot of trouble to get us here. What's the deal this time?"

Lily rested her hand on Demon's arm, and she could hear her sister's words through the link. *[[Careful, Demon. Don't make him angry. He could hurt us all.]]*

Demon sent back, *[[He's not angry, Lily. He's smug. He's up to something.]]*

Lucas smiled up at them again. "I hate to interrupt your little chat, but you know the deal, Whiplash. I told you on Ceti Gamma III that when we next met you'd have to make your decision. It's time to decide. Have you told your sister about the choice you have to make? It seems you neglected to tell your husband."

Demon froze. Lucas had told Matthew about the choice he had given her. That meant Matthew now knew what Demon had been keeping from him for all these years. How would he have reacted? Would he ever trust her again? Before she could pursue the thought further, she felt Lily's nails dig into her arm, and she knew what had caused Lily's reaction. Could Lucas really tap into their link? Could he 'hear' what they were sending? Or had he just guessed, and made his comment to rattle them. Demon sent to Lily, *[[Assume he can hear. Don't send any more.]]*

Lucas gave a small smile. Had he heard what Demon had just sent? Or had he just guessed again? It was impossible to tell, but they had to assume the worst. Demon swallowed, trying to hide how nervous that made her, but aware that in the very act of swallowing, she'd probably given away her anxiety. She kept her voice completely emotionless as she asked, "You know the answer, Lucas. No. No to all your choices."

Smiling again, Lucas said calmly, "That decision may not rest with you, darlin'." Before Demon could ask what he meant, he went on, "I'll let that lie just now, as I want something else. Just for the moment, all I want is fifteen minutes with my son. Alone."

Demon shook her head, "He's not your son and no. Not a chance. Never."

Lucas stood, shaking his head sadly. "Now why are you getting so worked up about this? Hear me out. I'm offering you both a good deal." He looked across at Lily and winked, saying softly, "Luscious as ever, Lily-love. Maybe I should find the time to pluck you again."

Demon felt Lily shudder, and knew that her red-headed sister was filled with fear and loathing for the man who was taunting her. The tall blonde moved slightly, bringing her body in between her little sister and Lucas, sheltering Lily in the only way she could. She kept silent as Lucas went on, "If you let me have a private little chat with Marcus, I'll let you see Fly-boy, and Lily here can take her brood and see her men, too." He gave a persuasive smile as he went on, "I won't harm the boy; you know that. I just want a few minutes of his time."

The tall blonde shook her head doggedly, while wondering why Lucas was so willing to let her and Lily see their men, when he had gone to such lengths to take them away. "Not a chance, Lucas. There's no way I'm letting you take my son away from me. I told you that five years ago, and nothing has changed." Demon could only hope she sounded a lot more resolute than she felt. Part of her wondered what she could really do to stop Lucas if he were determined.

As if he'd read her mind, Lucas said softly, "Well now, there's not much you could do to stop me, if I really wanted to take him, is there? But it doesn't have to be like that. Tell you what..." Lucas paused and pursed his lips, appearing to consider a deal that Demon might find more appealing. He smiled and went on, "Why don't I talk to him out on the terrace?" He pointed out of the French windows. "I can't take him away from you there. You and Lily can stay in here, making sure I don't run off with him. If you agree, then later on I'll get the guards to take Lily and her kids to see her men, while you come with me. We'll take Marcus and drop him off with Angel, and then you can go on and see Fly-boy. How would that work?"

Demon asked quickly, "Where is Angel? What have you done to her? Where are you holding her?"

Lucas smiled again. "Just agree to the deal, and you get to see Angel. She's safe and sound, but you can see that for yourself."

Demon was tempted. She knew Lily desperately wanted to be with her men, making sure they were still safe, and Demon was frantic to be with her husband, but not enough to sacrifice her son. She was about to refuse Lucas again when she heard the door to the bedroom open. Turning quickly, Demon saw Marcus appear in the doorway, and she moved quickly to stand between him and Lucas.

Marcus had his own ideas; he side-stepped his mother and looked up at Lucas, his expression somber. He went to speak, but before he could do so, a small, blonde tornado emerged from the bedroom, shrieking, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Demon couldn't move fast enough to intercept Mattie, and before she knew it, Lucas had bent and swept the little girl up into his arms. The tall blonde froze. This was her worst nightmare. Lucas had her daughter, holding her tightly against his chest, smiling up at the toddler.

His deep voice drawled, "Well, hello, darlin'. I don't think I've had the pleasure." He grinned at Mattie, turning on all his considerable charm.

Mattie frowned at him, completely unaffected by his charisma, then she yelled, "You're not my Daddy!" Before anyone could move, a small fist lashed out and made contact with Lucas' nose. Lucas yelled and nearly dropped the little girl, as she wriggled out of his arms and ran back to her mother.

Demon stooped and threw her arms around both her children, holding them protectively as she watched, appalled. Lucas rubbed his nose, wiping a small trickle of blood away with the back of his hand, and shaking his head. To Demon's amazement, when she extended her senses to pick up on his feelings, he seemed more amused than angry. Pulling a pristine white handkerchief from the pocket of his jeans, Lucas wiped his nose gingerly, checking it for more blood.

He shook his head and grinned at Demon. "I must be losing my touch. It seems like all the women in this family hate me today."

It was hard to resist the humor and charm with which he spoke, and Demon had to work to keep her voice steady as she said, "Just leave us alone, Lucas. Let us go and none of us will hate you."

Demon was acutely aware that the other children had followed Marcus and Mattie out of the bedroom, and Lily was now cuddling Naima on her knee, with Faylinn and Dasha sitting either side of her on the sofa.

The children all watched Lucas seriously as he smiled at them and said, "Hi, kids. Your Moms are getting themselves uptight here, but I just want a little chat with Marcus. Then you can all see your Daddies. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Lily's children all nodded silently, while Mattie started to cry into Demon's shoulder, sobbing

over and over that she wanted her Daddy.

Marcus looked from his mother to his sister and back, then turned and glared up at Lucas defiantly. "If I talk to you, will you let my sister see Dad?"

Lucas looked down at the small boy and nodded seriously, waving Demon into silence as she started to protest. "Yes. You have my word of honor. You can stay with your Auntie Angel, while your mother and sister go see your Daddy. If you've inherited any of your mother's powers, you'll know that I'm telling you the truth."

Demon watched as her son's eyes widened. No one outside the family was supposed to know about their powers. He turned to his mother and over-rode her verbal protests, sending through their link, *[[Don't worry, Mum. I'll be OK. If he does anything I don't like, I'll send to you and you can rescue me.]]* He gave his mother a wry smile, so reminiscent of his father it nearly broke Demon's heart. *[[If this is what he wants in exchange for letting Mattie see Dad, then I'll do it. Anything to stop her screaming!]]*

Demon sniffed as her eyes filled with tears of pride at her son's bravery. Mattie was indeed screaming in earnest now. The tall blonde felt completely torn. She knew that when Mattie got this hysterical, there was only one person who could calm her: Matthew. She had sensed Lucas was telling the truth when he had given his word of honor, and when he has said he wouldn't harm Marcus, but should she allow her son to be alone with this monster? Taking a deep breath, Demon made her decision and sent back to her son, *[[You stay linked with me every second! I want to know everything he says and does, OK?]]*

Marcus nodded seriously, then Lucas said, "When you two are finished with your chat, do we have a deal?"

Demon looked up at Lucas from where she was sitting on the floor, holding her screaming daughter, rocking her and trying to soothe her. She spoke loudly to be heard over Mattie's ear-shattering shrieks, wanting one last question answered before she gave her agreement to the deal. "Why can't Marcus come with us to see his father?" She really didn't trust Lucas, even when she knew he was telling the truth.

Lucas gave a wry smile. "Call it a guarantee for your good behavior."

In other words, Marcus would be a hostage, but at least Lucas would allow Demon to leave him with Angel, and he'd allow her to see her sister. She didn't like it, but in the face of Marcus' mental urging, and Mattie's screams, she eventually sighed and said, "Yes, we have a deal, but if you harm a hair on his head, I'll..."

Lucas waved her into silence with a grin. "Not in front of the children." He pulled a control from his pocket, pointed it at the French windows then strode across the room, throwing the doors to the terrace open.

Marcus took a deep breath and marched out onto the balcony, head held high, with Lucas following on his heels.

Demon looked across anxiously at Lily, where she still sat silently on the sofa, holding her children closely. The tall blonde couldn't help but think, *[Step into my parlor said the spider to the fly.]*

Lucas followed the small boy out onto the terrace, half amused, half proud of the way Marcus strode forward purposefully, head held high, not allowing any fear or concern to appear on his face or in his bearing. [That's my boy.]

Things were coming together nicely. The deal he had done with Demon allowed him the time he needed to start building his relationship with Marcus, and in exchange, she and her sister would be going exactly where he wanted them. When they were all in the cell block together, Lucas could arrange for the little 'accident' to take place, while Angel and Marcus were safe in another part of the castle.

A flicker of movement caused Lucas to turn his head and he suppressed a smile as he saw that Demon had moved to the window and was watching him closely. She still held the little blonde girl in her arms, rocking her gently, but Demon's face was a frozen glare as she stared out of the window. A mother wolf, watching closely, ready to pounce, as her cub faced a dangerous predator.

Lucas turned away and walked to the parapet, leaning back against the balustrade as he waved at Marcus to sit on one of the benches on the terrace. The small boy stared up at him defiantly. "So why do you want to talk to me?"

Suppressing his irritation at the boy's prissy English accent, Lucas gave one of his most charming smiles and replied, "Because I want to know more about you, Marcus. You seem interesting, and I can feel a..." Lucas paused, searching for the right word, then smiled again as he said, "a connection between us." He was very much aware that he'd have to pick his way carefully through this conversation. This kid would know the instant he told a lie. So he'd have to use half-truths and evasions to steer Marcus in the right direction.

"What's your name?" The boy looked up curiously as he asked the question, and Lucas smiled back.

"You can call me 'Lucas' if you like." Marcus shook his head, explaining that his teachers had told him he shouldn't call adults by their first names. Lucas laughed softly, and said, "OK, you can call me Sheriff Buck."

Marcus was intrigued by the idea that he was talking to a genuine Sheriff, and asked if Lucas had a badge. Lucas pulled his Sheriff's star out of his back pocket and was rewarded with a quick glance of admiration. While Marcus studied the badge, Lucas took the opportunity to really look at the boy. The riot of untidy blonde curls made it obvious who his mother was, but Lucas had been amused to see a copy of his own golden brown eyes glaring up at him earlier, and a replica of his own mouth questioning him. There was no doubt as to who Marcus' father was, either.

The boy had obviously made the same comparison, as he looked up, holding the badge out toward Lucas and asking abruptly, "Are you a relative? You look like my father."

Lucas took the star and nodded. "Smart boy. Your father and I are distantly related." The truth, but not the whole truth. Lucas went on, "I bet you're good in school, being smart like that. Do your parents realize what a clever kid they have?" Most kids felt unappreciated by their parents, and Lucas was hoping to open up the first crack between Marcus and his

family.

To his surprise, Marcus nodded and smiled. "My Mum tells me I'm smart and brave and handsome. She says that a lot. I like my Mum,"

Lucas's eyes flicked across the terrace, his lips quirking into a disappointed smile as he saw Demon still standing at the window, still glaring out at him. Having failed at his first attempt, Lucas tried again. "And your father? I bet he's strict, ain't he?" Fly-boy was military trained; it couldn't help but rub off on the way he brought up his kids.

Marcus frowned and nodded, but then went on, "A bit, but he's fair. That's what I like about Mum and Dad. They're always fair. Some of the other kids at school tell me about things their parents say and do, and it doesn't seem right, but Mum and Dad always explain things."

He looked up at Lucas and his eyes burned with pride as he said, "And my Dad's a hero. He saved the whole of Earth and all the people there, but he doesn't like to talk about it. He was Captain of a big starship, and we all lived together on it, but he left when Mattie was going to be born, 'cos he wanted us all to be safe, 'cos he loves us. That's the cool thing about having this power from my Mum. Even when Mum and Dad weren't talking much to each other, all the time I knew they both loved me and Mattie. They still had all those icky feelings for each other, too. They just got stupid for a bit and stopped talking, but it's all fixed now and we're all happy again, except Mattie's not happy right now because she wants Dad and you've taken him away. Why did you do that?"

Lucas blinked a couple of times, trying to take in the flood of information that had just hit him. Interesting though it was that Fly-boy's marriage had hit a rough patch, he concentrated on coming up with a truthful answer to Marcus' question.

Sighing a little dramatically, Lucas chewed his lip for a moment then replied carefully, picking his way through a minefield of veracity, "It's complicated, Marcus. Me and your Auntie Angel had a thing going a few years back, before you were born. She came and lived with me for a while, but then I lost her. She was taken away from me. But I never forgot her, and I always wanted her back. I still do, and I think deep down she still wants me. But your parents don't approve of me, and they'll do whatever they can to keep us apart. So I'm just trying to get a little time, a little space, so I can talk to Angel and tell her how I feel and what I want."

Lucas frowned and concentrated on trying to feel like a frustrated lover. The frustration was easy enough. Dealing with this kid was more challenging than most adults. It wasn't easy to manipulate someone who'd know the instant he lied. He went on, "If I hadn't taken your father away to talk to him privately, he would never have let you and me have this chat, and he'd never let me spend time with Angel. Can you understand now why I had to do that?"

Marcus nodded reluctantly, then said quietly, "Auntie Angel has been sad for a long time now. Ever since Uncle Michael died."

Lucas fought down the fury that threatened to overwhelm him at the mention of Michael Healy's name. The man who had dared to marry Angel. Well, Lucas had soon put paid to that! Wrestling with his anger at the thought of Angel marrying another man, Lucas remained silent as Marcus continued speaking softly.

"I didn't like Uncle Michael at first. I thought Auntie Angel might not love me as much if she

loved him, too. But she did and he was nice." Marcus rambled on about what a wonderful uncle Michael had been, and Lucas fought hard not to let his irritation show in either his face or his emotions. If Marcus sensed Lucas' antipathy toward Michael Healy, the game would be up. So Lucas kept his face passive, crossing his arms as he leaned back against the balustrade and waited for Marcus to finish his sickly, prattling praise of his dead uncle.

The kid was beginning to irk Lucas as he finally sighed, saying, "It's not fair."

Lucas uncrossed his arms and went to sit next to Marcus on the bench. The boy now sat, his head down, staring at the ground, and Lucas knew he was struggling with tears. He gently patted Marcus on the back, and said, "No, it isn't. I'm afraid life's often like that, Marcus. Unfair. We just have to deal with it as best we can, and look to our friends to help us."

He left his arm around the boy's shoulder, and was rewarded after a few seconds by feeling Marcus relax a little. Lucas felt he was making progress, so after a few more moments of silent sympathy he smiled and patted Marcus' back again, saying, "I tell you what. Now we're friends, let's cheer ourselves up with some apple pie and ice cream. We can go to the kitchens and get some right now, if you like."

He knew he'd pushed too far when Marcus looked up at him, eyes narrowed in suspicion. The boy said sullenly, "I don't like apple pie." Lucas wondered if it was genetic. Would any son of his ever like apple pie? What was the matter with his kids? Before he could suggest an alternative, Marcus wriggled out from under Lucas' arm and stood abruptly.

"My mother says it's time to go in now."

Lucas shook his head and smiled mischievously up at the child, while mentally cursing the link Marcus had with his mother. He couldn't listen in on that link, though he'd had fun earlier playing head games with Demon and Lily, pretending he could overhear their sendings.

"Do you always do what your mother says, Marcus? Don't you ever play hooky and have a little fun? I could show you the castle. Then I could take you to see your Auntie Angel." Lucas brought his considerable powers of persuasion to bear on the boy, glancing back toward the window where Demon still stood, although she no longer held the little girl in her arms.

The brat shook his head stubbornly. "I'll wait until my father can show me the castle, thank you."

That prissy English politeness sent another surge of irritation through Lucas, and he knew instantly that Marcus had felt it. Lucas stood, shoving his thumbs into his jean pockets, and looked disdainfully down his nose at the boy. "Daddy's boy, eh?" He allowed the full weight of his contempt to show in his voice, and he was rewarded by Marcus' flush.

He soon realized that it wasn't embarrassment that had colored Marcus' cheeks but anger, as the boy lifted his eyes and glared back up at the man towering above him, with a look in his eyes that Lucas had often seen glaring out of a mirror. "Yes, I'm my father's son, and my mother's son, too. If you want to call me a Mummy's boy, then go right ahead. I don't care!"

Lucas knew the kid was lying, but he also knew better than to try and call him back, as Marcus flung himself across the terrace and back through the French windows.

With a sigh, Lucas leaned back against the parapet again and considered. He was afraid he'd left it too late. If only Gideon had died when he'd been supposed to, four years earlier, things might have been different, but by now whatever potential Marcus might have had was almost gone. Demon and Fly-boy had ruined their son, giving him attention and affection, letting him know how much they loved him. Such a waste.

Lucas thought back fondly on what he'd managed to achieve with his other son, Caleb. Brought up by a drunken father, with no mother and a mad sister, Caleb had been perfectly primed when Lucas had stepped in to take him over. But even Caleb had been ruined in the end, turned back to the light by his cousin, Gail, and that damned doctor. The doctor who looked altogether too much like the doctor who was currently under lock and key in a cell in the guard block.

Sighing regretfully again, Lucas decided he wasn't quite ready to write Marcus off yet, but he was close. He decided to change the terms of the deal he'd made with Demon. He wouldn't send her to the cell block to burn with her husband just yet. Lucas straightened and strode back across the terrace and on into the white room beyond.

As soon as Lucas had left the room and closed the window to the terrace behind him, Lily had moved quickly to retrieve her spell from where she had pushed it down the side of the sofa. She then hid it among Demon's bags, and moved back to comfort her children. They bombarded her with questions about the man who had just left with Marcus, why he looked just like Uncle Matt, and why he was there. Lily did her best to answer, all the while conscious of Demon standing at the window, holding Mattie tightly as she watched what was happening out on the terrace.

Dasha startled his mother by suddenly 'pathing, *[I've been trying to send to Aboji, but I can't hear him. Is he all right?]*

Lily tried to reassure her son, sending back, *[I think there's something blocking us. It seems we can link and 'path when we're close, but not far outside the room. That's why Auntie Demon is watching Marcus so carefully. She needs to concentrate to link with him while he's outside with Lucas.]* Even thinking the name sent a little of shiver of horror down Lily's spine, which she was careful to conceal from her children.

She had deliberately kept quiet all the time Lucas was in the room, not wanting to distract Demon from her verbal sparring, giving her moral support without interrupting. *[It's not because he scares me witless, really. It isn't!]*

Shuddering again just at the memory of the look Lucas had given her, Lily focused all her attention on calming the children. After a few moments, they all fell silent, and Lily realized that Mattie, too, had gone quiet. She seemed to have cried herself to sleep again on her mother's shoulder.

Lily stood and walked to the window, trembling as she saw Lucas standing outside, leaning back against the parapet. He looked so handsome as the sun shone down on the soft waves of his hair, but Lily still shivered when she saw him. She would never forget how Lucas had callously and cold-bloodedly tried to murder John.

Touching Demon's shoulder, she said softly, "Here, let me take Mattie." Demon looked down and gave her a grateful smile, before passing over the sleeping little girl. Then she returned to her vigil at the window.

Lily took Mattie back to the sofa where Naima had curled up with her thumb in her mouth and was now fast asleep. With a gentle smile, Lily lowered Mattie to sleep next to her cousin, then turned to the twins. Before she could speak, Faylinn gave her a baleful stare and said plaintively, "I'm hungry, Ma. When will we have dinner?"

Lily gave a guilty start. She had lost all track of the time, but realized that it was now early evening. The children hadn't eaten for hours; it was no wonder they were hungry. She wondered whether she should bang on the door and ask the guards outside to bring them something, but then she heard the sound of the door to the terrace opening and spun around to see Marcus coming back into the room. He ran straight to his mother and hugged her tightly.

Demon wrapped her arms around her son and hugged him back, and for a few moments, Lily watched, smiling gently, knowing that mother and son were comforting each other through their link. Then Lucas appeared through the door, and Lily knew she had to speak to him. She couldn't allow her fears to control her.

Pulling herself up to her full height, the little red-head looked at the man who still made frequent appearances in her nightmares and said quietly, "The children are hungry. Can you arrange for some food to be brought here? Or to wherever John and Luke are, if you're taking us there now."

Lucas looked back at her, and Lily swallowed her fears, telling herself that he really didn't look that evil, he just looked like Matthew. She wasn't scared of Matthew, so why should she be scared of this man? The predatory smile Lucas gave her revived all her fears, and she felt Dasha move to stand beside her, clasping her hand and 'pathing to her, *[[It's OK, Ma. I'll protect you.]]*

Hugging her son to her side, Lily sent a wave of love and gratitude through their link and waited for Lucas' answer.

He looked from Lily to Demon and back, then said quietly, "I'll have the food brought here. I promised you that you'd see your men, and so you will, but not until tomorrow." He over-rode their protests with a wave of his hand, saying, "The deal was that you'd see them. I didn't say when."

Moving to the door, Lucas looked back and nodded to Marcus. "We'll talk again soon, but you take note, son. I made a deal with your mother and I *will* deliver. You can trust a man who keeps his promises." He took the control he'd used previously from his pocket, and pointed it at the windows, reactivating the force field.

Then Lucas was gone, moving so fast it almost seemed that he'd vanished.

Luke Raven's eyes followed his partner across the small cell for the umpteenth time, as John continued pacing like a caged animal. [Which is exactly what we are, I guess,] Luke thought,

giving the chamber a quick once-over. This was a proper cell, not like the room Lily had locked him in when they had first arrived on Eriadne--no way to get out as easily as he had then. [Too bad Dureena never got around to teaching me the finer points of her profession,] he thought regretfully.

Neither John nor Luke had anything on them which they could use as tools, anyway--they had barely been allowed time to get dressed by the men who'd barged into Lily's room. Fortunately John, Lily, and Luke had at least had time to grab some towels, before the intruders had realized they were in the bathroom. The first one to enter, a particularly big fellow, had involuntarily shrunk back in the face of Lily's fury as she'd snarled at him, "How dare you!" His face had turned bright red with obvious embarrassment. But the other three men who had entered behind him weren't so easily impressed.

They had thrown clothes at the threesome and curtly told them to get dressed, ignoring demands to explain their presence. Instead, they had threatened to hurt the children if Lily, John, and Luke failed to cooperate. Lily had closed her eyes, apparently to hide the pain the thought caused her, but Luke recognized the expression on her face--she was linking to her children. The look she'd given John and Luke a few seconds later had told them that these strangers weren't lying.

John had then given them his word that they'd cooperate for now, and despite her obvious fury, their Fire-Lily had confined herself to giving the strangers a challenging look as she'd dropped her towel unceremoniously, before slipping on her dress. Only one of them was bold enough to ogle her openly. The picture of three grown, heavily armed men blushing furiously and turning away quickly, trying to pretend they weren't embarrassed, would have been funny in another situation.

Luke hoped that Lily was with her sisters. The men had split the threesome up after leading them out of Lily's room. The big one had steered Lily in the general direction of Demon's rooms, while the other men had steered John and Luke into this cell. Luke wasn't sure how much time had passed since then, as neither he nor John had a watch, and neither had they had the opportunity to grab their commlinks before they'd been hustled out of their rooms. Even so, he knew that several hours had passed. No one had bothered them during that time, and Luke quickly suppressed the irrational thought that maybe they had been left here to starve and die. [Get a grip! They probably just want us to be nervous.]

Luke realized that John had stopped his pacing, and was now standing still as a statue, eyes closed, a concentrated look on his face. After several seconds, he opened his eyes again, grimacing, then continued to pace as if he'd never stopped. Luke had lost count of how many times his partner had done that since they'd been brought here. He knew what it meant, and they had talked about the implications of John's inability to contact Lily and the children. [If John is right, then our families really need all the Gods' and Goddesses' protection.]

Forcing the negative thoughts away, Luke shook his head and stood, walking up to John and putting his hands on the younger man's shoulders to stop him.

"John, all you're doing is making us both more nervous. You really don't need to pick up all Matt's bad habits just because you're his successor on the Excalibur, you know. Sit down, please. There's nothing we can do right now."

John seemed about to argue, but then sighed and let Luke lead him to the cot, where they both sat down. He leaned his head against Luke's for a moment, eyes closed and breathing deeply, and when he straightened, he seemed to have calmed down a little. "I'm sorry." John smiled apologetically. "I just... I should have brought my PPG with me. I should have realized something was wrong when those strange Brakiri met us. I..."

Luke shushed him gently, covering John's lips with the tips of his fingers. "We've been over this already, John. If not even the sisters noticed what was wrong, how could we? You're a telepath, but you're not omniscient."

John shook his head with a sigh, lowering his eyes, and Luke cursed himself for bringing up his partner's telepathic abilities. Even though he hadn't said anything, Luke knew that John was cursing himself for not having used his telepathic abilities to find out the intents of their welcoming committee at the shuttle. [But that wouldn't be you, my love.] And even if he'd have scanned the strange Brakiri who had escorted them to the castle, they had probably carried hidden weapons, so resistance would have been futile, and could have been fatal.

In the three years of his Captaincy of the Excalibur, John had been very careful about using his powers, despite the message Matthew had given him from President Sheridan, after confirming John would be his successor: *"Sheridan wants you to use all your abilities, your skills and your knowledge to lead this ship and the people on it. Don't handicap yourself."* That choice had been taken away from him now, though--John had been blocked from the moment the men had burst into their rooms, so he hadn't been able to scan those men to find out who they were working for.

Finally, John softly said, "I just wish I knew what was going on. Where our children are, and what happened to Lily, Angel, Matthew and Demon. I hate feeling so helpless and being unable to contact anyone..."

He looked up into Luke's eyes again, the implications of the block that prevented him from using his telepathic powers hanging in the air between them. Lily was the only one of the sisters who was able to block John, but she had taught her partner how to get through to her directly during the Joneses incident six years before. Yet what she had taught him then didn't work now.

Dasha was the only other telepath in their group, and while he seemed to have inherited some of his mother's Vorlon-bred blocking ability, in addition to his father's telepathic powers, he wasn't strong enough yet to keep that block up for so long. Besides, neither Lily nor Dasha had a reason to block John. Had there been any other telepaths on Eriadne, strong enough to block John completely, they'd have been found out by Lily or Dasha, who could have neutralized them. So unless they resorted to far-fetched, fantastical theories, that only left one possibility. One person. One man, who had successfully blocked John before.

John's voice was raw with emotion as he added, "I just can't stop thinking about what Lucas Buck might do to our families."

Luke shook his head, feeling his own fears rise again, accompanied by anger at how much hurt and pain Buck had caused them all before. [Especially Angel. Just when she was doing better again after losing her husband. Why can't the universe leave her in peace?] But he refused to give in to those emotions. If Lucas Buck was behind this, they needed to be

level-headed.

"Anything is possible with Lucas Buck," he said softly, "But if this man--or whatever he is--has one weakness, it's his arrogance. We know not to underestimate the Witches of Eriadne and their children by now. Let's hope he hasn't learned that lesson yet."

As Lucas entered his quarters, his eyes immediately fell on Angel, who stood in the middle of the living room, looking like a lamb waiting for the slaughter. He noticed the fallen bookshelf, with its debris scattered all over the floor. As he stepped over some books, he asked with a smile, "Couldn't find anything good to read?" Lucas knew exactly what Angel had been trying to do. [Got to admire her spirit,] he thought, as he came around the sofa to stand in front of her.

"Drop dead!" spat Angel, her blue eyes shooting daggers at him. Lucas stood still, hands on hips. He didn't respond straight away, taking a moment to admire what he saw. Even after all these years, she was still one of the most beautiful, sexy women he'd ever known. Her raven hair fell loosely, framing her face. The black leather pants she wore fitted every curve perfectly. The red, halter-neck T-shirt clung to her breasts like a second skin. They just begged to be touched. [Soon,] thought Lucas, before moving his eyes to take in the rest of her appearance.

She was thinner than he would have liked her. He preferred a little more meat on his women. It wasn't fun making love to a bag of bones. [Still mourning for her husband?] Wondered Lucas, coldly. [Well, darlin', you'll soon get over him.]

Lucas told himself it wasn't jealousy he was feeling. After all, he'd taken care of the problem Michael Healy posed. He just didn't want the dead getting in the way of his plans, any more than the living. Reminded of his plans, Lucas focused back on Angel, who to his delight was giving him a look that could have killed. If only she knew how intoxicating her anger and defiance were.

"What's the matter? Still not happy to see me?" Lucas asked, as he reached out to cup her face. Angel jerked her head away and glared at him.

"Don't touch me!"

"That's not what your body was saying to me a couple of hours ago," he reminded her, pleased to see her blush.

When Angel said nothing, Lucas decided it was time to change tactics. Although it was fun tormenting her, he knew he'd have to apply some honey if he wanted to catch this fly. Sighing, Lucas apologized, "I'm sorry, love. That wasn't fair of me. I know this must be a shock for you, and I know you're a little afraid. I promise I'm not here to hurt you or your family. What happened when you betrayed me is forgotten. I don't want to punish you for that." [Well, not without a little pleasure involved.] He watched as uncertainty and surprise flickered in Angel's eyes.

To his surprise, she started laughing. "You've got to be kidding, Lucas! Do you think I was born yesterday? Do you really expect me to believe that? You want something, and it can't be good, if you had to lay in wait, and take me and my family captive to get it. I want to know

what you want, Lucas and I want to know now."

Lucas shook his head and placed his hand over his heart in a gesture of sincerity, as he approached her slowly. He didn't stop as she backed away from him. "Angel, I've already told you what I want," he said, gently backing her into the wall dividing the bedroom from living room. He saw her eyes widen in panic, as he trapped her between the wall and his body. He quickly went on, soothingly, "I want you, Angel. I've missed you, and I just want to be with you. Why do you think I kept appearing like I did? If I'd wanted to kill you, would I have risked my own capture to save your life? I'm sorry I've had to go about things this way. But it's the only way I could think of to get time with you. If you'd known I was coming, you would have run from me. Your family won't be hurt, you have my word on that." [As long as you do what I want.]

He was pleased when Angel didn't try to pull away from him. He could see her trying to figure out if he was telling the truth or not. Carefully, he lifted his hands and worked them slowly up the bare skin of her arms to her shoulders. He held back a grin, as he felt her tremble.

"All I want is to be with you, Angel, and I know you want me. You've never stopped loving me. Why fight it? You know we belong together," he finished seductively. Seeing no resistance, Lucas lowered his mouth and nibbled on her lower lip, before gently pushing his tongue between her lips.

When Angel made no attempt to pull away, Lucas deepened the kiss. He moved one hand to cup the back of her neck, as his other hand moved down to fondle her breast. He heard her moan as he caressed her through the fabric of her T-shirt. Lucas had to resist the desire to rip the T-shirt from her body before taking her against the wall. Instead, he let his hand move under the fabric to cup her naked breast in his hand. Then without warning, he found himself being pushed away. There was a wild look in her eyes, as she yelled, "No!"

Lucas reined in his growing annoyance, "No?"

Moving away from him, Angel nodded, "You heard me. No!"

[Not a word I like to hear, Angel,] he thought. Controlling his temper, Lucas gave her a gentle smile and tried to catch her hand, but she moved out of reach before he could capture it.

"What's wrong, Angel-face?"

"Stay away from me! I'm not going to let you get to me," she snapped. "I can't think straight when you touch me, and I want my wits about me. So just stay the hell away from me, and tell me what you want, Lucas. What you *really* want!"

Clearly Angel wasn't going to stop asking that question until she was given an answer that satisfied her. Lucas was beginning to see that honey wasn't going to work on this fly. [Guess it will have to be vinegar after all].

"I would have done this the easy way, Angel-face, if you'd let me," drawled Lucas, dangerously. He let Angel squirm for a moment, before continuing, "You really want the truth?" He watched her swallow nervously, before answering.

"Yes."

"Well," began Lucas, pausing as he sat on the backrest of the sofa, crossing his legs at the ankles and folding his arms. He made her wait as he looked at the ground for a moment. Finally, he looked up, a smile on his lips as he told her exactly what he wanted.

"I want you to give me an heir."

Angel stared at Lucas, dumbfounded. Had she heard what she thought she'd heard? "What did you just say?"

"You heard me," said Lucas.

"You want me to have your baby?" asked Angel, softly. She couldn't believe this was happening, or at least she didn't want to believe this was happening.

"I need an heir," explained Lucas.

She'd heard the words, and she knew Lucas wasn't kidding, or playing some kind of sick game with her. Angel felt sick inside, knowing why he needed an heir. She closed her eyes on the sudden wave of dizziness that threatened to engulf her. [Oh my god]

Angel had never dreamed when she'd discovered all she had about Lucas and the Rage within him, and its need to be passed from one generation to the next, that Lucas would one day trap her, telling her he wanted her to give him--give the Rage--an heir. She suddenly felt like laughing. [This is what it must feel like to go insane.] It took enormous control for her not to give way to her hysteria or say something to Lucas about knowing why he wanted an heir. She knew it would be a bad idea to reveal that she knew about the Rage.

Calling up all the strength inside her, Angel pretended to react in the way Lucas would expect. "Why?" she asked.

"What man doesn't want to continue his bloodline? I want an heir who'll continue the Buck name."

Putting into practice the skill that had won her an Oscar, Angel kept her face as controlled as possible. She again felt like laughing hysterically. [Continue the Buck name?] Angel told herself to rein in those thoughts, but it was almost impossible, given what she really knew about Lucas and the monster that possessed him.

Angel now knew what Lucas wanted from her, but it raised a question. "Why me, Lucas? Why do you want me to give you a child? Surely you could have chosen any other woman. There must be plenty who'd be more than willing to give you what you want. And why now, after all these years?" queried Angel.

"No other woman would be good enough to give me the perfect heir. You weren't ready before, but you are now." The self-assured way Lucas spoke refueled her anger. Did the bastard honestly think she'd willingly give him a child? She guessed he did, because what Lucas didn't realize was that she knew about the Rage and its need for a host. Angel ignored her inner voice as it warned her to be cautious and not to antagonize him.

Lifting her head, Angel asked defiantly, "And what if I refuse?"

Lucas' mouth curled up in a smile that sent a shiver down her spine. He answered in a low drawl, "Oh, you'll do it. If you don't, I'll just have to fall back on plan B, and take Marcus. The boy could go either way. He's not completely spoiled yet. With my guidance, he could turn into a fine Buck. Of course, if I were to do that, your sister and her hero husband would try to stop me, and I'd probably have to kill them. The same would apply to anyone else who got in my way."

Lucas paused, as he reached out to take Angel's hand and pull her closer to him. She was too numbed by his statement to resist. His voice was deceptively gentle as he went on, "I don't want to do that. I know how you feel about your family. But this is about *my* family and I'll do whatever it takes. You have a choice. Say yes, and I'll let your family go, and never bother them again. Say no, and I'll have no choice. I'll take Marcus."

Fear, anger, hatred and confusion threatened to overwhelm Angel. She'd made a vow to herself when she'd learned the truth about him that she'd do whatever it took to keep him and the Rage from Marcus. If she could give Lucas what he wanted, her family would finally be safe from him. Isn't that what she'd always wanted, ever since she'd brought Lucas into their lives? On the other hand, Angel knew if she did this, and stayed with Lucas, eventually he would destroy her. And no matter how much she loved him, she wouldn't be able to stop him. She felt helpless and trapped. She'd battled long and hard to get control of her life, and now Lucas was back, taking everything away from her again. Angel couldn't take that lying down.

"So, what's it gonna be, Angel?" asked Lucas, breaking into her thoughts.

Pulling free of him, Angel looked at him coldly, "You tell me I have to give you a child, and you threaten my family if I don't. What kind of monster are you?"

"Needs must," answered Lucas, callously.

"You have no heart!" accused Angel, angrily. She silently hoped that was only because of the Rage inside.

"Would you change me, if you could?" asked Lucas, softly.

"No," she said. There was no point in lying. He'd know the truth anyway. What he couldn't know was that while she didn't want to change him, she did want to be rid of the demon inside him. Then he could be the man she knew he could probably be, the man she had glimpsed on brief occasions, the man who could be tender and kind.

Lucas smiled and approached her. "Then there's no point in fighting, is there? You'll just make things harder for yourself. You love me. Would it be so terrible to stay with me and have my child? We could be good together, if you'd just stopped resisting me," said Lucas, his hand reaching out to caress her face. "What's it going to be, yes or no?"

Angel knew this was a decision that would change her life, and the lives of her loved ones. Even though she knew what her answer would be, she needed time to think and to gather her frayed emotions, and figure out a way that she would give into this without sacrificing everything.

"I need time to think about it."

After a moment's silence, Lucas finally gave a brief nod, "OK. There's something I need to take

care of. I'll be gone for a couple of hours," his voice trailed off as he walked past her, toward the door. When he reached it, he turned. "That should be enough time for you to make up your mind."

Lucas paused again. Angel watched as he chewed the inside of his lip and held her eyes with his, before finally continuing, "If you haven't. I'll make the choice for you."

With that threat hanging in the air between them, Lucas left. Angel stood in the middle of the room, wondering how she'd ended up in this nightmare.

That question kept playing in Angel's head as she tried to get to grips with what Lucas wanted. She knew the answer. This was the moment that everything in her past had been leading to since she'd first met him. What surprised Angel wasn't that he was back--she'd always known this day would come. What surprised her was that Lucas wanted her to have his child. In all the time they'd been together on Babylon Five, he'd never hinted at wanting her to have his heir, although she knew *why* he wanted one.

Lucas has said she wasn't ready before, but now she was. [What the hell does that mean?]

She supposed it didn't really matter. What mattered was the choice she'd been left with. Angel felt like laughing. Lucas said she had a choice. But the truth was she didn't. Lucas had taken away her free will. The bastard knew she'd never say no to what he wanted--she'd do whatever she could to ensure her family remained safe.

Angel didn't need time to think about what she would do. She'd give him what he wanted. It didn't matter what she felt about him or the Rage. Her feelings were of little consequence now. If she could keep Marcus out of Lucas' grip, that was all that counted.

[Oh come on! Stop playing the martyr. You're not doing this just to keep your family safe!] Her inner voice intervened. At any other time, Angel may have tried to deny it, but it was the truth. She had other reasons for staying with Lucas. No matter how cruel he could be, no matter how often he hurt her, or made her life a misery. No matter how long they had been apart, she still loved him. [Fool!] Maybe she was, but she held onto the belief that the man beneath the Rage was worth loving, even if the Rage that controlled him scared the hell out of her.

Turning from the window, Angel went and sat on the sofa. For a moment, a wave of exhaustion washed over her, but she refused to let it take her down. She didn't have time to be tired. She had to think.

Lucas believed he was in control, and essentially he was. However, he--the Rage--was going to learn that she wasn't the same weak person he'd known years before. Back then, Lucas had been able to bully her, without her having any strength or will to resist. This time would be different. If she were going to give him what he wanted, it would be on her terms. It seemed pointless, because he really did have all the power, but she had to retain some small measure of control of how things progressed. It was the only way Angel knew she could survive this situation without losing herself.

Sitting back, Angel's thoughts turned to her family. How could she tell them that she was going to stay with Lucas? She knew they'd be horrified and resistant. She dreaded what would happen. Angel just hoped that when she explained her reasons, they wouldn't fight her

decision. She feared, most of all, what Lucas would do to them if they tried.

Sighing, Angel wished desperately that Lucas hadn't cut her off from her sisters. Now more than ever she needed them, and if she were with them, she could be sure they were OK. All she had to rely on, at the moment, was Lucas' word that they would remain unharmed, as would Matthew, Luke and John.

Closing her eyes, Angel tried once again to link with her sister. She gave up after a few attempts. Even without Lucas' block in place, it was almost impossible to establish a link these days with Demon unless they were in the same room. Sighing again, Angel opened her eyes.

Lifting her legs, she curled them under her and wondered what her sisters and their husbands were doing. She began to smile. She suspected they were all trying to find a way out of their respective locations. There was a small flicker of hope in Angel's heart. Maybe they'd all get out, rescue her and then they'd all be able to escape Eriadne before Lucas knew what had hit him. [Dream on, Angel]. It was a nice dream though. It was a much better thought than the one she was trying to ignore.

Would Lucas let her stay in touch with her family, once she was with him? Considering how he was now keeping her isolated from them, from their influence and strength, Angel feared he wouldn't.

[Maybe I'll be able to make a deal on that one,] thought Angel. There were a few deals she wanted to make with him. She just hoped he didn't call her bluff on any of them.

Suddenly, Angel yawned and she snuggled down further on the sofa. She really was exhausted. She turned and glanced toward the door. She had a feeling Lucas wouldn't return for some time yet. [Maybe getting some sleep isn't a bad idea]. She would need all her wits about her when Lucas came back, and being tired wouldn't help.

Shifting her legs, Angel stretched out on the sofa and closed her eyes. Despite her fears and endless thoughts, she was asleep within minutes.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes

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