

The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes - Part 3: Divisions

by [The Space Witches](#)



Will this be the last time that these three Witches see each other?

Chapter 1

Angel stood in the shower and closed her eyes as the cascade of water washed over her. One of Lucas' thugs had arrived a short time before to tell her when Lucas would soon come to get her for dinner. She was calmer now, but she was nervous about what was to come.

She knew what she had to do and she accepted it. Telling her family would be very hard, but she knew she could do it. She had no other choice. If Angel had to be ruthless about it, she would. She couldn't let those she loved stop her from doing what she had to do: ensuring her family would never be hurt by Lucas or the Rage again.

Opening her eyes, Angel turned off the water and climbed out of the shower. Wrapping herself in a towel, she walked through to the bedroom and headed over to the closet. Lucas had provided her with a full wardrobe of clothes. [I wonder what happened to the stuff I came with,] she thought.

She reached for an outfit, not paying any real attention to it as she dropped it on the bed. She glanced over at the clock on the wall. It was 18:00. She had to finish getting ready. Lucas would be there in half an hour. While she dressed, Angel kept saying a little mantra in her head. "You

can do this. You can do this. You can do this. You HAVE to do this!"

A knock on the door of Demon's rooms brought Lily's head up quickly. She was sitting on one of Demon's sofas, legs tucked up, trying to work the knots out of Faylinn's unruly strawberry blonde locks. But the comb she was holding lay forgotten in her hand as her attention went right past one of the strange Brakiri who had greeted them when they had arrived on Eriadne, and instead fastened on the two people who followed him into the room.

With a shriek, Lily scrambled to get up, almost tripping over her dress in her hurry to hurl herself across the room and toward the familiar face, which she had not quite dared hope to see.

"Kirrin!" Lily literally threw herself at her friend, almost bowling the sturdy Brakiri midwife over. Kirrin's arms closed around her, and Lily leaned into her embrace, feeling tears of relief rise in her eyes. When she finally lifted her head to look up into her friend's face, Lily could see it lit by a warm smile.

In a rough voice, Kirrin said, "I see you've lost none of your energy."

Unable to speak for the moment, Lily laughed, then cleared her throat. "It's good to see you, too." Her eyes were drawn to the young woman who stood behind Kirrin, watching them with wide eyes. The Brakiri woman let go of Lily with one arm and turned, allowing Lily to pull Kirrin's daughter into a one-armed embrace.

"Thikira?" Lily said in a hoarse voice, "Goddess, how much you've grown!"

Thikira smiled. "It's odd suddenly to be the same height as my teacher."

Lily giggled, and ignoring the guard's impatient look, took mother and daughter by their hands, pulling them over to where Demon, Matthew, and the children were waiting. They obviously hadn't wanted to interrupt Lily's reunion with the Brakiri woman who had become her best friend after the witches had been awoken from their long sleep.

"I'm glad to see you well, Demon. Captain." Kirrin bowed her head, smiling as the Gideons greeted her, while Thikira smiled just a little shyly. Demon and Lily then introduced the two Brakiri women to the four older children--Mattie had been put to bed a while before and was fast asleep already, the tall blonde explained.

Marcus, Faylinn, Dasha and Naima seemed relieved to see a friendly face, even though they had only really seen Kirrin and Thikira through their messages. The twins and Marcus had still been babies when they had left Eriadne with their parents, and Naima hadn't been born until two years later.

"We were worried about you," Demon told Kirrin, allowing her relief to show in her eyes and a tiny smile.

"We are fine," Kirrin reassured them, putting an arm around her daughter's shoulder. "All of us are, don't worry. They're treating us well, but Lucas Buck and his gang have been keeping us away from the castle since a couple of days before you arrived."

Marcus started saying something, but a tug at her sleeve distracted Lily, and when she looked down, she found Dasha looking up at her, with Faylinn and Naima standing just behind him.

"Will *they* ba... stay with us while you're at dinner?" Her son asked in a whisper.

Lily quickly hid a smile--her children had taken objection to the word 'babysitter', saying they were not babies anymore--as she replied. "Yes, Kirrin and Thikira will stay with you while we're at dinner."

"We will indeed," Kirrin agreed, smiling at Lily's children. "I hope you don't mind?"

They looked at each other, then returned the smile, shaking their heads. "You're much better than those horrible men who work for Lucas," Faylinn stated, firmly, "and you always sounded like fun when you were talking to Ma. Especially the last time..." She quickly bit her lip when Dasha discreetly elbowed her--but not quickly enough for Lily to have missed the comment.

"Last time? Last time Kirrin called was late at night, when you were supposed to be sleeping, Miss Faylinn. You're lucky we don't have time to discuss this in more detail now." She gave her older daughter a narrow-eyed look, clearly promising punishment later.

Faylinn mumbled something under her breath, to the effect of not being able to sleep when her mother was laughing so loudly, but before anyone could say more, the Brakiri guard called from the door, "Cut the chatter. You don't want to keep the Boss waiting."

Lily gave Demon and Matthew a quick annoyed glance, but refrained from commenting and squatted down to hug her son and daughters. "Be good, and do what Kirrin and Thikira tell you."

A triple, "Yes, Ma," was the answer, and Naima whispered into her ear, "Will you come kiss us goodnight?"

"Yes honey, I'm sure we won't be that long. Don't worry." She stood and smiled at her children one last time, then joined Matthew, Demon and Marcus, who were waiting in the open doorway, next to the still very impatient looking guard, who gestured for them to move on. Lily made a point of leaving the room at a very leisurely pace, just because. You never show fear of the enemy, after all.

Thikira asked, "So, would you like to play some Brakiri games?" but the children's response was cut off as the door closed behind her.

"Don't try anything," the guard warned, gesturing for them to go ahead.

Lily exchanged a nervous look with Demon as she fell into step with her, Matthew and Marcus. What would await them in the dining room? Lucas had promised them that they would see Angel there, but Lily couldn't forget his ominous words.

"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."

This was one dinner none of the guests were looking forward to, because there was just no telling what the host had planned.

Demon held Marcus' hand tightly as they walked down the corridor toward the main dining room, with Lily leading the way, and Matthew walking on their son's other side. The Brakiri guard followed closely, making sure they didn't tarry or stray from the shortest route to their destination.

[[It'll be OK, Mum, honest. Now Dad is back, everything will be OK.]] Marcus' mental voice sounded confident in Demon's head as he sent through their link, until he added, *[[Won't it?]]* In those last words, Demon heard all her son's fears.

She squeezed his hand tightly, sending back, *[[As long as we're together, we can face anything and win. Together we have strength that even Lucas doesn't dream of.]]*

Demon felt the wave of relief that swept through Marcus as he sensed the conviction behind his mother's words and relaxed. She glanced over her son's head and saw Matthew was looking at her, with a tiny smile on his face. Her husband may not have been able to hear the mental exchanges between mother and son, but over the years he'd learned to sense when they were happening. Demon wasn't quite sure how he did it. Perhaps it was the expressions on their faces, but he always knew.

Matthew must have felt the tiny wave of relief that had escaped Marcus when he'd heard his mother's reassurances, and now he smiled at his wife, adding his sense of assurance to hers. Demon knew what she had sent to Marcus was true. Together the Gideon family was far stronger than they could ever be apart.

Separated from Matthew, Demon had felt cast adrift, bereft of the steadying influence of her husband and lover. Her emotions--panic and fear--had threatened to overwhelm her, but as soon as Matthew had returned, the tall blonde had felt calmed and steadied. With Matthew at her side, nothing was impossible. Somehow they would get through what was to come.

Earlier in the afternoon, Lily had taken the children out onto the terrace, giving Matthew and Demon an hour alone together. They had first barricaded the door between the living room and the corridor with one of the sofas, and then retreated to their bedroom. They had made love eagerly, their need for each other pouring out in their emotional and physical connection. Relaxing in the aftermath of their passion, they had entwined themselves around each other and talked quietly about what had happened and what was to come.

Matthew had confirmed that Lucas had told him about the events that had taken place on Ceti Gamma III, five years before. Demon knew that her husband had been annoyed that she hadn't confided in him at the time, but she'd also felt his understanding and acceptance of her motives. She smiled softly to herself as she remembered Matthew's words. He had kissed her forehead gently and whispered, "It's OK. I know you were just doing what you always do. Trying to protect us all."

They had gone on to discuss the choices Lucas had given her then, and the options now remaining to them. Letting Marcus become Lucas' heir was not even a consideration, and for a while they had debated whether their son should join them at dinner, or whether it would be better if he remained with the other children in Demon's rooms. They had eventually decided Marcus would be safer with them. If they left him with a babysitter, even if it were one of their old Brakiri friends as they hoped, Lucas' men could take him at any time. So they had

agreed that Marcus should accompany them to the dinner Lucas had planned for them.

Matthew had hugged Demon tightly as he'd said, "That only leaves one option, and I guess that's what Lucas thinks Angel is going to tell us tonight. He's probably told her about the choices he gave you, and knowing Angel, she's planning to sacrifice herself to save Marcus and the rest of us. She's never got over the guilt of being the one to set Lucas free from the Box. She'll feel this is the way she can repair all the damage that's been done since."

Demon had felt her husband's own guilt as he'd spoken, and she knew Angel wasn't the only one who felt responsible. Matthew carried his own burden of remorse for having kept the Apocalypse Box at his side, taking its counsel and advice. Without the Box, Lucas would never have been let loose on the world, and all the terrible things that had followed, including the death of Dureena's child, would never have happened. The tall blonde had lifted her hand and caressed her husband's face, sending her love, knowing that words would never provide the reassurance he needed.

They had held each other tightly again, as Matthew had whispered, "We won't let her do it, Deborah. We'll find a way to protect her, from Lucas and from herself. If I have to kill Lucas with my bare hands, then that's what I'll do before I'll let him take Angel or Marcus from us."

Demon shuddered at the memory of Matthew's emotions as he'd spoken. He'd felt like cold metal, full of steely resolution.

Marcus distracted Demon from her thoughts by squeezing her hand again, and she looked down to see her son gazing up at her anxiously. He'd picked up on her concerns and was worried again.

Sending another wave of reassurance through their link, Demon braced herself as they arrived at the doors of the dining room. A shiver ran through her body as the doors swung wide and a line from Shakespeare sprang into her mind unbidden.

"By the pricking of my thumbs. Something wicked this way comes."

Lucas looked down on the dining room from the gallery above and sneered. As soon as Lily had entered the room and seen her men waiting for her, she had flung herself into their arms. The three of them were now entwined about each other, touching, kissing, caressing in a manner that Lucas felt was entirely unsuitable in public, particularly when a child was present.

He pondered on whether to signal Sol, who stood with Harry and Bubba, the moronic twin brothers, just inside the doors to the dining room, telling him to break up the reunion. He was just about to do so, when Angel shifted at his side, and he paused, reminding himself that he was supposed to be playing the good guy. [OK, let them grope each other for a while if that's what they want. No skin off my nose.]

Lucas went back to watching the group below, shaking his head as he thought how pathetic Luke and John must be. It took both of them to keep luscious Lily happy. He smiled to himself as he wondered if he should take her aside and remind her what a real man was like. A man who could satisfy her needs all by himself. Tempting as the idea was, Lucas rejected it. It would hardly endear him to Angel if he started seducing her sisters.

Thinking of Angel's sisters made Lucas shift his attention to the other trio standing in the room below. Demon stood quietly, holding her son's hand, with her husband on Marcus' other side. The boy stood between his parents, standing tall, holding their hands, but in no way appearing clingy or weak. He watched the reunion taking place across the room with a quiet smile, and Lucas reminded himself that Marcus was an empath. He would be picking up on all the lustful feelings being projected by Lily, Luke and John.

A surge of pride rushed through Lucas as he watched his son closely. The boy was tall for his age, a little skinny for his height but not scrawny. His handsome face showed his paternity as clearly as his blond curls showed who his mother was. Lucas shook his head again. Such a waste. With the right upbringing, Marcus would have made a fine heir.

Looking from son to mother, Lucas' lip curled as he saw that Demon had changed her clothes since he'd seen her last. She now wore a severe black trouser suit, which covered her skin from neck to ankle, but couldn't hide the curves of her body underneath. Didn't she realize that covering up like that just made men want to rip those clothes off her? Of course she did. It was probably the reason she had chosen the outfit. To taunt Lucas with that which he had once tasted, but which she would never willingly give him again.

This time the emotion that surged through Lucas was hatred, and he had to suppress the Rage yet again, while wondering why this woman aroused that part of him so easily. In many ways, Lucas liked and admired Demon. She was good looking enough to meet his extremely high standards. He also liked her strength and resolution, the way she tried to protect her family, and her devotion to the people she loved. All admirable qualities, for which he had a sneaking regard, but it was those same qualities that aroused the Rage in him; that made him want to hurt her, to humble her, to bring her to her knees, as he had done that morning.

Lucas felt a quiet, deep satisfaction at the memory of Demon kneeling at his feet, begging him to let her family go. That satisfaction was instantly replaced by anger, when he remembered why she had done that: she was now unable to bear his child. In a moment of rare self-discovery, Lucas realized that although he wanted Demon humbled, only *he* was allowed to do that.

Only *he* could hurt her.

Anyone else who tried would have to be punished.

One day, he'd make sure Galen paid for what he'd done to the tall blonde. Lucas just hoped that Gideon might die trying to kill the Technomage in the meantime.

Angel shifted again at his side, this time silently moving toward the stairs that led down from the gallery to the main dining room. Lucas reached out and gently grasped her arm, saying softly, "Not just yet, darlin'. I know patience ain't one of your virtues, but try to practice it a little longer."

Angel looked up at him with a puzzled expression on her face. The crystal blue clarity of her eyes made Lucas' heart turn over inside him. He lifted his hand to caress her face, thinking that his Angel had never looked more beautiful. Her hair was caught up into a careless swirl on top of her head, soft tendrils of curls falling about her shoulders. The red dress she wore cupped her beautiful breasts, lifting them and presenting them for his admiration. It took all Lucas' willpower not to drop his hand and slide his fingers inside the dress, searching for the

hard nipple that pressed against the thin, lacy material.

"Why are we waiting, Lucas? I want to be with my sisters." Her voice was soft, not challenging, and her eyes begged rather than demanded. This was a softer Angel than the woman he'd seen earlier that day. This was his Angel of old, the woman he lov--[Don't go there. There's only weakness and stupidity waiting for you there,]--lusted for.

Shaking his head, Lucas spoke softly as he ran his thumb along Angel's cheekbone. "I know you do, Angel-face, and we'll go down there soon enough. Just give me another minute."

Lucas turned his attention back to the main room below, dropping his arm around Angel's shoulders, holding her gently to his side. She didn't pull away. [Good. Progress at last. I'll have her in my bed soon enough.]

Moving his gaze to the last person in the room, Lucas had the satisfaction of knowing he had no mixed feelings here. His attitude toward Gideon was unalloyed loathing. He hated the man Gideon was, and he hated what Gideon had. What right did Fly-boy have to a doting wife, loving son and devoted daughter? Why should he have the perfect family? A gorgeous woman at his side, his good-looking children gazing on adoringly. It made Lucas sick.

His anger rose further when he remembered the wave of passion that had swept through the castle earlier, making it clear to everyone that Gideon was making love to his wife, and yet again satisfying her needs. [I should have had that part of him cut off when I had the chance, then see how much fun they'd have together in the sack!]

Lucas shook his head again, reminding himself that this wasn't the time to dwell on just how much he'd like to dismember Gideon. Angel wouldn't be happy if he went around chopping bits off Fly-boy. That thought alone was enough to rouse the Rage again, as Lucas finally admitted to himself what it was that he most hated about Gideon.

Glancing down at the woman at his side, Lucas realized she was now watching Gideon, the brave, noble Captain, who stood holding his son's hand tightly, ready to defend his family with the last breath in his body. [Oh, do me a favor!]

What Lucas hated most was Angel's love for Gideon. He had no intention of allowing that to continue. Angel was his, body and soul. He would cauterize the love she had for Gideon and her sisters out of her soul. She would love only one person. She would devote herself to just one man.

Lucas Buck.

"Mum? Why does Sheriff Buck feel all peculiar when he looks at Auntie Angel?"

Marcus' loud whisper to his mother dropped into a sudden silence around the dinner table. Until then, conversation had been stilted but generally polite. Demon glanced up quickly at the man sitting to her right, catching a momentary coloring of Lucas Buck's cheek before he grinned at Marcus and asked, "And just what kind of peculiar feeling might that be, son? Come on now, there's no need to whisper. Spit it out so we can all hear."

Demon started to send to her son, *[[Don't...]]* but was cut off before she could complete her sentence. Marcus had lifted his head, his face flushed with annoyance at the amused contempt that both he and his mother could sense emanating from Lucas, and which was also audible in Lucas' voice.

"It's the same way Dad feels when he looks at Mum. Like hot fizzy pop. Do you want to marry Auntie Angel and have babies with her, like Mum and Dad?"

The silence that followed could have been cut with a knife.

Since Lucas had entered the dining room, descending the stairs from the minstrels' gallery with Angel on his arm, everyone had tried to behave as if this was a normal dinner party, with no undercurrents of tension and fear. Even knowing the devil he was, Demon hadn't been able to stop herself admiring how Lucas looked, his long legs encased in his usual tight black jeans, his strutting walk enhanced by his cowboy boots. Tonight he wore a black velvet vest over a white shirt with an under-collar of black silk.

When Demon first saw that shirt she had taken a deep breath, immediately dragged back in memory to a day nearly two years before. Angel's wedding day. Michael and Matthew had worn similar shirts and vests then. Demon wondered whether Angel had noticed the similarity, and prayed that she hadn't. The last thing Angel needed at this time was a reminder of Michael Healy: a good man who had truly loved her. Demon had glanced at Angel's left hand and saw that the wedding ring Michael had given her sister was still on her ring finger. Angel had never brought herself to remove the ring since Michael had been taken from her so tragically.

Angel looked beautiful in the unfamiliar red dress she wore, no doubt provided by Lucas, who had displayed the raven-haired beauty on his arm like a trophy. Demon had determined that this monster would never again possess her sister. He may think he had won the game, but it wasn't over yet. Demon just wasn't quite sure how she could change the outcome.

The three sisters had come together in the middle of the dining room, holding each other tightly and sending muddled thoughts.

[[Are you all right?]]

[[What did he do to you?]]

[[Where have you been?]]

[[Are the children safe?]]

The words wrapped around each other until Demon pulled her two sisters close and sent a wave of love and reassurance to them, silencing their frantic words. In the silence that followed she sent, *[[We're all safe and well so far, but we still have to deal with Lucas. Let's start doing that now.]]*

The sisters had turned together and stared defiantly at their captor, who smiled back at them, his amusement apparent. "Ladies. Welcome home." He had then waved them to the oval dinner table where he had arranged them according to his plan. Angel sat on his right and Demon on his left. Marcus sat between his mother and father, while Luke was on Angel's other side, with Lily between him and John.

Lucas had apologized for the uneven numbers of men and women, then leaned in to whisper in Demon's ear as she'd moved past him to the table, "If I'd sired a daughter on you, the numbers would have been even."

Demon had shuddered, ignoring the taunt and seating herself quickly, then turning to make sure that Marcus was sitting safely next to her, with his father on his other side, where they could protect him best. Lucas had started a discussion about the condition in which he'd found the castle and villagers when he arrived, gradually drawing the others into conversation. He had drawn Luke and Lily into describing their memories of the village school when Marcus had whispered his question to his mother.

The silence that followed Marcus' defiant response to Lucas was finally broken by a harsh laugh. "That's an interesting question, son, but I think your Aunt Angel is the one best qualified to answer it."

Lucas pushed back his chair and stood with his legs apart, hooking his thumbs into the pockets of his jeans, and narrowing his eyes as he looked around the table.

"I'm going to leave you people to talk awhile. Harry and Bubba over there will stay here, just to make sure you don't get any silly ideas about wandering off." He gestured at the twin monoliths standing either side of the double doors, looking like gargoyles guarding the doorway of a medieval cathedral.

Lucas strode across the room, grabbing the door-handles and pulling the doors ajar, gesturing Sol to lead the way out of the room. When the big man had left, Lucas span on his heel in the opening, and turned to face the others still sitting at the table. "Angel has something to tell you. I'll be back in an hour." He turned and left, pulling the doors silently closed behind him.

Demon turned to her sister, seeing that all the color had drained from Angel's face. The tall blonde dreaded the words she knew she was about to hear.

Until the moment Marcus had opened his mouth, Angel had felt calmer than she could have thought imaginable throughout dinner and Lucas' attempts to engage everyone in polite conversation. But Marcus' innocent question had thrown her into a tailspin, leaving her staring at Lucas, trying to read his reaction to her nephew's announcement, desperately hoping the little boy had sensed the truth but warning herself not to allow her hopes to be raised too much. She wanted to question Marcus and to ask Demon if she sensed the same emotion from Lucas. If what Marcus sensed were true--that Lucas loved her--then she wouldn't be so torn about staying with him.

Angel felt all eyes trained on her and she knew this wasn't the time to think about what Marcus had said. Lucas would be back in an hour. Taking a deep breath, Angel opened her mouth to speak, but before she could get the first word out, Gideon stopped her.

"We know what you're going to tell us, Angel. We know what that son-of-a-bitch wants you to do."

Taken aback, Angel looked around the table, noticing something in the way Gideon, Demon and Lily were now watching her. They knew. [How?] Angel's mind reeled. How could they know

about the deal Lucas had made with her? She realized Lucas must have said something to them. Angel was getting more confused by the minute. Why would he make her tell them she was staying with him, if they already knew?

The only people who looked confused were Luke and John. "What are you talking about, Matt?" asked Luke, confirming Angel's suspicions.

Again, before Angel could speak, Gideon answered. "Lucas is forcing Angel to stay with him."

"What?" asked Luke and John in disbelief.

When Angel tried to explain, Gideon cut in again, annoying Angel because he was making her feel like a ventriloquist dummy--every time she opened her mouth Gideon's voice came out. She may not have been thrilled about having to tell her family about this, but she'd have preferred if she could do it herself and not have Gideon do it for her.

"Lucas has given Angel a *choice*. If she stays with him and gives him an heir, he won't come after Marcus," explained Gideon softly. Angel didn't miss the sarcastic note in his voice as he said the word 'choice'.

"No!" responded Luke vehemently, turning to Angel, looking at her as if hoping she'd tell him Gideon was mistaken.

Angel swallowed before answering softly, "It's true, Luke."

"You can't be seriously considering this, Angel?" asked Luke, searching her face.

"I've already agreed. There's no other option," responded Angel.

"The hell there isn't!" snapped Gideon, rising from his seat. "You are not staying with him!"

Nerves and tension got the better of Angel and her control broke, causing her to snap back, "The days of you telling me what to do are long gone, Matt. I'm not a member of your crew any more, and you're not my Captain. I've made my decision and it's final!"

"Please, don't start fighting," said Demon, speaking for the first time. "Please, sit down, Matthew. Getting angry isn't going to make this situation any easier, nor is fighting. It's just going to upset everyone," she paused to look at her son, drawing their attention to the little boy, who was staring at them, wide-eyed.

Gideon sighed then sat, nodding to his wife before saying calmly to Angel, "Luke is right, you *can't* do this." Angel opened her mouth about to argue, but Gideon raised a hand to silence her. "Just hear me out. I know Lucas is trying to force you to give him an heir so he'll leave Marcus alone. I know you've agreed because you want to protect us. I also suspect you're doing this because you've always felt the need to make amends for bringing Lucas into our lives in the first place..." he paused to let his words sink in before continuing, "but we're telling you, you don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do Matt! Don't you understand? This is the only way. If I don't do this, Lucas will come after Marcus and he'll kill anyone who gets in his way. I won't let that happen!" snapped Angel.

"What's Auntie Angel talking about? I don't want to stay with that man. I don't like him!" said Marcus, clearly becoming distressed.

All eyes turned to the little boy and Angel felt like kicking herself for speaking out and upsetting her nephew. Demon moved closer to her son and put her arm around him, whispering reassuring words in his ear.

"You won't have to stay with him, sweetheart," assured Angel gently. The fear she'd seen in Marcus' eyes had reaffirmed her decision and she wasn't going to let anyone change her mind.

Gideon leaned forward again and spoke vehemently. "And neither do you, Angel."

Angel sighed and looked at him. Why was he opposing this so strongly? Surely he wanted to keep his son safe? She was trying to make it easy for them all. Why couldn't her family just let her do it? Maybe if she told them that she wasn't just staying out of the need to ensure their safety, that she loved Lucas as well, they'd be less resistant to this. Her inner voice whispered in her head, telling her that wouldn't help. She ignored it. She had to try whatever she could.

Before she could voice her thoughts, Gideon, yet again, cut her off. "I know why you want to do this, and we love you for that. But we can't live with ourselves if we let you sacrifice yourself to Lucas. We can fight this--together--and Lucas will find he has a fight on his hands the likes of which he's never encountered before."

Angel had to stop herself laughing hysterically. They were hardly in a position to fight Lucas, not when surrounded by his thugs, giving Lucas the advantage.

Luke replied before Angel could speak, his deep voice calm and reasonable as always. "Matt, believe me, I agree with you about fighting Lucas, but how can we do that? Lucas could take Marcus now and we'd be powerless to stop him. Maybe if Lily, Angel and Demon still had the power they once had, they could stop him, but they don't. We're out gunned and out numbered here. If Angel says 'no' to Lucas, he could just take Marcus and--well, you know what would happen then." Not wanting to upset Marcus again, Luke was careful not to voice the fact that Lucas would probably kill them all.

"Luke's right, Matt. We don't exactly have the upper hand here," cautioned John.

At last Angel felt she had two people on her side, who were making sense and not fighting this. Well three, actually. Angel realized that Demon wasn't arguing either. Why would she? It was her son who was in danger, and like any good mother, she would do whatever was necessary to ensure her son's safety. [Thankfully.]

"I haven't been retired for so long, John, that I'm not aware of the issues. I know we have to come up with a plan to beat Lucas. It won't be easy, but we can do it," said Gideon with conviction.

John nodded in agreement and much to Angel's dismay, Luke did, too, saying, "Damn right!"

"It's too risky, and I won't let any of you endanger your lives!" argued Angel in frustration

"So you don't want us to fight for you? Why are you so willing to go with Lucas, Angel? We

don't want or expect that of you!" Gideon was being his usual stubborn self. While Angel loved him for it, she could feel her frustration growing.

Angel sighed. She could see there was no way she could win this argument, not unless she made it abundantly clear that nothing they could say or do would change her mind. It was time to tell them the whole truth.

"Did it ever occur to you that there might be another reason I'm agreeing to Lucas' deal?" asked Angel softly. "I love him."

"Angel, you can't mean that!" barked Luke, looking at her in shock

"Why not, Luke?"

"Because of what he's done to you...and to us. He's caused nothing but pain, heartbreak and fear. He's threatening to take Marcus by force if you don't stay with him. How could you still love a man who's forcing you to do that, Angel?" asked Luke, challengingly.

Angel sighed. How could she make them understand her love for Lucas, when she herself didn't? "I know he's done terrible things and he's hurt me--all of us. I know what he is, believe me I know. But I can't help what I feel and right now it's helping me to do this. There's more to Lucas than any of you know. He's capable of kindness. He saved my life for godsake!"

"Only because he had an ulterior motive," Angel turned to look at Gideon as he went on, "Come on, Angel, you're not a fool. He probably only did that to ensure you lived so that he could force you into this insane deal of his."

Gideon's words stung. Angel didn't want to believe that was the only reason why Lucas had saved her life. "That might be, but you heard what Marcus said over dinner; what he felt coming from Lucas when he looked at me,"

Angel was cut off by Gideon shaking his head. "He's not capable of love, Angel, and you can't love him. You're just scared and you're trying to believe something that will make this easier for you. How can you think a man like that can love you after having been married to Michael? He showed you nothing but love and kindness. You must know you'll never have that with Lucas."

The mention of Michael's name tore at Angel's heart and she snapped, "Don't bring Michael into this. Michael's dead! I know what I had with him and I know in my heart that I'll never have that with Lucas, but I love him and I *will* stay with him and give him what he wants."

Angel waited for Gideon to respond, but to her surprise he hesitated. He opened his mouth, as if to say something, but for whatever reason, he held back. Angel could see frustration creasing the handsome planes of his face. She was a little surprised that he was holding anything back, then she decided that it was probably for the best, especially if he'd been going to argue.

As Gideon sat back in his seat, Angel turned her attention to Demon, who all this time had remained silent as she'd tried to comfort her distressed son. "Demon, you at least should understand what I'm doing. I know you'd rather die than let Lucas take Marcus from you. I can't let that happen."

Angel instantly regretted her outburst as she saw Marcus' eyes widen and he started to cry softly, clinging to his mother as he whimpered, "You're not going to die, are you, Mummy?"

Demon hugged her son, "No, of course not."

Gideon moved closer to his wife and son and put an arm around the boy. "I'll never let anything happen to you or your Mommy," he said gently. Marcus looked at his father, his chin quivering.

"Matthew..." began Demon, looking with concern at her son.

Gideon nodded, understanding whatever silent communication his wife was directing at him. "I don't think Marcus should be hearing this," he said to everyone gathered around the dining room table. "I'm taking Marcus back to Deborah's rooms."

Demon rose and picked Marcus up, then with Gideon leading the way, they marched toward the door, only to be stopped by the two solid monoliths on guard there.

"My son is upset and tired. We want to take him back to our rooms," said Gideon, standing face to face with Harry. Harry was at least a head taller than Gideon and twice as wide, but Gideon didn't look intimidated at all.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you leave," responded Harry, his voice slow but clear. He may have been bigger than Gideon, but faced with a man who looked identical to his boss, he was clearly nervous. [So he should be,] thought Angel, darkly.

"Look, my son shouldn't be here. Now let us go. One of you can take us, while the other stays here," insisted Demon, moving towards Bubba, who went pale as the tall blonde trapped him between her and the door. It didn't seem to occur to him that he was bigger than Demon and that she was carrying her son, whom she'd not risk hurting by doing anything to Bubba.

"Ah, Harry!" he said, calling to his identical twin in distress.

Harry turned and held up his arm, barring Demon from getting closer to his brother. "Look, lady, I can see your boy is scared, but we've got our orders and I ain't going against what the Boss wants," said Harry thickly.

"Harry," whined Bubba as Gideon moved between him and Demon, forcing Bubba further back against the door, "Don't make the pretty ladies mad. I heard Sheriff Buck call them Witches, and that one," he pointed at Angel, "said she could turn me into a toad."

"Shut up, Bubba," ordered Harry as he kept his eyes firmly on Gideon and Demon. Bubba's face dropped, but he said nothing further as he stood watching Demon nervously

"I don't care what your boss said, I'm taking my son out of here!" Gideon moved to push Harry out of the way, but for a man of his size Harry moved quickly and he pulled out his gun, aiming it directly at Gideon's chest.

Angel and Lily gasped, jumping up from where they still sat around the dinner table, as did John and Luke, both of them moving to Gideon's aid. Without looking at them, Harry told them to back off. When Luke and John continued moving, he said again. "Don't force me to kill him."

John and Luke froze, while Angel and Lily reluctantly sat back down. Angel's heart was thumping in her chest. Things were getting out of control.

"Matthew, maybe we should sit down. I don't want Marcus here, but neither do I want you or anyone else hurt," said Demon softly, reaching out a hand to touch his arm.

It seemed to take forever, but Gideon finally nodded and holding up his hands, he stepped back.

"Go back and sit down," ordered Harry, waving the gun at the table.

"One day, we'll meet again," threatened Gideon. Angel couldn't see his face, but she could imagine the look in his eyes. Dangerous. Harry and Bubba may not have been the sharpest crayons in the box, but from the way they twitched, they knew they were dealing with a man every bit as dangerous as their boss.

For a moment, the hand holding the gun wavered, then steadied as Harry ordered again, "Sit!"

Demon held her son tightly in her arms and whispered soothing words in his ears as he clung to her. She turned and with Matthew walking beside her, they joined Angel and the others at the dinner table. Gideon shot a few more dark looks toward the gargoyles at the door before he focused on helping Demon calm his son, gently stroking the boy's back and assuring him that everything would be OK.

"Why is everyone so upset and scared, Mummy?" asked Marcus, his little voice thick with worry as he looked up from where he'd had his head buried in his mother's neck.

Angel could see Demon was struggling to answer, so she leaned forward to look at her nephew. "Hey, kiddo, it's going to be OK. I'm trying to convince everyone to let me do something, but they're not sure it's a good idea. Everything's going to be OK." She paused to give meaningful looks to everyone before going on reassuringly, "I'm going to make sure of that"

The boy's blood-shot eyes looked up at her hopefully, "You promise?"

Angel had to swallow a lump before answering, "I promise." She lifted her hand to make a cross over her heart, then gave her nephew a smile and was rewarded with a tentative little smile in return.

"Don't make promises you may not be able to keep," warned Gideon under his breath, as he brushed a curl from his son forehead.

"I'm not. This is a promise I *can* keep," answered Angel with determination, taking care to keep her voice down so she didn't further upset her nephew. Thankfully, due to his parents' loving attention, and despite the strong emotions Marcus was sensing, he calmed a little. He looked a lot younger than his seven years as he leaned his head on his mother's shoulder, and closed his eyes.

"Matthew is right, Angel. You can't know that for sure. This is Lucas, after all," warned Luke.

"I know," said Angel, looking at Luke a moment before turning back to her sister, "And you didn't answer my question, Demon. You want Marcus to be safe, don't you?"

The two sisters looked at each for a long time, while everyone around the table watched them

quietly. Angel's eyes flickered around the room, aware that even Harry and Bubba were listening closely. Suddenly, something occurred to her and her eyes flickered up to the Minstrel's gallery, searching it quickly for any indication that Lucas may be watching and listening. When she couldn't find any sign of him lurking in the semi-darkness above them, she turned back to Demon, who nodded.

Angel sighed in relief until she saw something in her sister's eyes--guilt. Her sister was feeling guilty; she didn't need to be an empath to know that. "But I don't want you to sacrifice yourself, if there's any other way," said Demon softly. For a moment their eyes met, and then Demon lowered her gaze.

"There's no other way. Letting me do this is a guarantee of everyone's safety," said Angel, trying to give her sister some reassurance.

"And what about your safety, Angel?" Gideon's voice drew Angel's attention from her sister.

"I'll be fine." Angel shook her head and stood suddenly. "Look, I've made my decision and nothing is going to change it. I'm not going to go on discussing this! You *will* let this happen, do you understand? Or I swear to God, I'll warn Lucas. I'll ask him to make sure you're all kept under guard until you board the ship to take you home. I don't want you playing the hero, Matt, do you understand? I'm doing this, and if you love me--if you love your son, Demon and the rest of our family--you'll let me!"

The room plunged into silence. Angel was tempted to tell them about the deal she'd made with Lucas. About him agreeing to let her go once she'd given him what he wanted, if she asked. But she knew that would just make her family more determined. They'd know how hard it would be for her to leave her child.

"We're not happy about this, you know, and if we can find a way to get you away from him we will," warned Gideon.

Angel nodded. She did know. Gideon wouldn't be able to rest until he thought Angel was safe from Lucas. She had no doubt that once they were away from Eriadne and back on Earth, Gideon would start making plans to rescue her and arrest his arch enemy. Gideon still had a promise to keep to Dureena--to make Lucas pay for the death of her unborn child.

It was small consolation that Angel was sure Lucas wouldn't remain on Eriadne. Considering that all this time no one had been able to locate Lucas, wherever he took Angel, it would be impossible for Gideon to find them.

Movement out of the corner of her eye took her attention away from Gideon, and she watched as Lily rose and came over to her. Her little sister threw her arms around Angel and hugged her tightly, whispering in her ear, "I wish you weren't doing this!"

Angel hugged her sister back, "I know."

Lily kissed her cheek then rushed back over to John and Luke who gathered her in their arms, trying to comfort her and each other. The room descended into silence again. What more was there to say? The silence was broken by the sound of the large dining room doors opening. Heart in her mouth, Angel watched as Lucas sauntered back into the room.

Demon watched as Lucas walked across the room to Angel, a small smile quirking his handsome mouth as he lifted his hand and ran a thumb along her cheekbone. It was a gesture that made Demon shudder, as it was identical to the way Matthew so often caressed her face. Suddenly, she wasn't sure that she ever wanted Matthew to touch her in that way again. What had been a gesture of loving affection from her husband was turned into something expressing ownership and possession when used by Lucas Buck.

"Did you give them your news, Angel?" Lucas' voice was soft and low, seductive and sexy, as he gazed possessively into Angel's eyes, his thumb continuing to brush her cheek.

"Yes, Lucas." Angel's voice was equally soft, and Demon shuddered again, thinking that her sister had once more fallen under the spell of Lucas' seductive powers. Demon longed to scream at her sister to resist, to stand up to Lucas, to tell him to go to hell, but the consequence of Angel's refusal could be devastating. If Angel denied Lucas, he would take Marcus, and Matthew would die. Demon had no doubt about that outcome. The way Lucas had stacked the cards against them, there was no other possibility.

Lucas turned to face the others, sliding his arm around Angel's waist and pulling her to his side. Again, he looked like a man demonstrating his ownership of something rare and precious, but before he could speak, Matthew stepped forward.

"Angel has told us what you expect of her, and we know what you've said will happen if she doesn't comply," Matthew was choosing his words carefully, not wanting to upset Marcus again. The little boy was half asleep, sitting on his mother's knee with his arms around her neck and his head resting on her shoulder. "But don't think this is over. You may have us at a disadvantage right now," Matthew waved at the guards still standing by the door, "but that can change."

Demon watched as her husband stared defiantly at Lucas. The two men faced each other, nearly identical in so many ways. Their handsome faces held the same expressions of confrontation and defiance, and the only distinctions between them were the strands of gray lacing Matthew's soft brown hair. They had both aged well, their bodies equally slim and muscular, their backs straight and faces resolute. Demon just wished that their personalities were more similar. Then she could have happily dreamed of joy for her sister in her partnership with Lucas.

But Lucas had something extra inhabiting his body and his soul, something evil, the likes of which had only touched Matthew briefly, during the years when he had carried the Apocalypse Box with him. Lucas carried the Rage permanently, and he bore his burden proudly. That fundamental difference between the two men meant that Lucas could never give Angel the happiness she deserved, and Demon was sure that one day he would destroy her.

Lucas' lips curved into a smile that was nearly a sneer. "Anything can change, Fly-boy, but timing is everything. Can things change fast enough for you to stop Angel coming with me? I don't think so. Now, I think it's time for Angel and me to wish you people good night and..."

Before Lucas could finish his sentence, Angel interrupted him. "No, Lucas."

Lucas looked down at the woman at his side, surprised by her interjection. Demon wanted to

cheer. Her sister wasn't totally spellbound by his charm after all.

"No? That's not a word I like to hear, Angel-face." Lucas' face looked hard and cold, but Angel didn't waver as she moved away from his side to stand and face him.

"You'd better get used to it, because you're going to be hearing it from me a lot more than you're used to." Glancing across the table, Demon saw Lily, Luke and John were all hiding smiles. They were all ready to cheer Angel on in her defiance. The raven-haired beauty went on, "I want to spend this last night with my sisters. After tonight I may never see them again. I'll give you what *you* want, but *I* want this in exchange."

Lucas chewed the inside of his lip, another gesture he shared with Matthew and one that meant trouble. Matthew only chewed his lip when he was annoyed. Then, to Demon's amazement, Lucas smiled, saying, "OK, darlin', you have a deal. The men can go back to Whiplash's rooms and take care of the rug-rats. You three can spend the night in Lily's room."

Angel smiled up at him and said gently, "Thank you, Lucas."

For a moment, Lucas' face changed. His expression became gentle, and if any other man had looked at her sister in that way, Demon would have said he loved her. Stretching her senses, Demon reached out to try to feel what Lucas was feeling, but it was too late. He'd clamped down on whatever emotion had overtaken him, and all Demon could feel now was his sense of satisfaction as he leaned forward and whispered so low that Demon could barely hear, "Tomorrow I'll let you know how you can repay me."

Demon sighed. This was the future to which her sister was surrendering herself: a future in which every kindness had to be bought and paid for. The tall blonde stood and spoke before any of the others could intervene. "I'll join Angel and Lily in a little while, but I have to put Marcus to bed first."

Lucas glared at her for a moment, then nodded. "I'll escort the ladies myself," he turned and gave Lily a lascivious wink, then went on, "while the boys can take the rest of you." He nodded at Demon, saying, "Harry will escort you to Lily's rooms when you're done."

Demon stood and carried her son over to join Matthew, and they watched Lily say her farewells to her men. Matthew leaned forward and took Marcus from Demon's arms, saying, "He's too old and too heavy for you to carry all the way to your rooms."

The tall blonde reached up and caressed her husband's face, saying softly, "I'd carry him and you to the Rim and back if I thought it would keep you safe from harm."

Matthew turned his head and kissed her palm, whispering, "I love you."

Gideon followed Luke and John down the corridors leading to his wife's old rooms, carrying his son, all too aware of the two guards following them. He tried to think of a way he could work with John and Luke to overpower Harry and Bubba, but he drew a blank. There was nothing he could do right now that wouldn't endanger Marcus and Deborah.

Leaning his head forward, Gideon pressed his lips to the curls of his sleeping son's head. Marcus was exhausted and hadn't even stirred when passed from his mother to his father. The last few days had been emotionally traumatic for the child, and his father wanted to get his son and the rest of his family away from the cause of that trauma as soon as possible. But he still didn't want to sacrifice Angel to achieve that, and he had the glimmer of an idea of how he might achieve his goal.

Arriving outside the door to Deborah's room, Gideon passed his son back to his wife, saying quietly, "Put him to bed and I'll be in shortly." It was time to see if his new plan would work.

Deborah frowned, glancing briefly at their guards, but took Marcus without argument and followed John and Luke into the living room. Gideon pulled the door closed on the sound of Luke and John greeting Kirrin and Thikira, and turned to the two hulking men standing behind him.

He looked from one to the other, seeking signs of difference between them, but they were truly identical. Every craggy feature was duplicated, their body size and shape identical, even the spiky untidiness of their dirty brown hair absolutely the same. The only difference Gideon could discern was a slight spark of intelligence and awareness in one that was not present in the other.

Looking at the one with the tiny glimmer of brainpower, Gideon asked, "Harry? That's your name, isn't it?"

Harry nodded, saying, "This is my brother, Bubba. Most people can't tell us apart. We're i-den-ti-cal." The big man pronounced the last word carefully, enunciating each syllable proudly.

Gideon suppressed a smile and nodded. "I noticed."

Before he could go on, Harry intervened, his voice deep and slow but determined to have his say. "You and the Boss look alike. Are you twins, too?"

The thought of having Lucas for a brother sent a shudder down Gideon's spine. He'd never been quite so glad to be an only child as he was at that moment. Somehow he suspected that if Lucas had had an identical twin, his brother would have been strangled by his own umbilical cord before birth.

"No, but we're distantly related." It wasn't an admission Gideon enjoyed and he was damned if he was going to try to explain that Lucas was actually his great-grandfather to the power of ten, or something like that. He went on hurriedly, before Harry could ask more questions. "I wanted to ask you if you understand what's going on here."

Gideon looked from Harry to Bubba and back, but to his surprise, it was Bubba who replied. "The boss wants the pretty lady to go with him, and you don't want her to go." The big man's voice was even slower and deeper than his brother's, but he'd grasped the essentials of the business at hand.

The retired Captain nodded. "That's right. But she doesn't really want to go with him, so he's blackmailing her, forcing her to do something she doesn't want to do. Why are you helping him do that?" Gideon could only hope that Harry and Bubba understood the words he used. He tried to keep it simple for them, hoping they were not quite as dumb as they looked, and

that they had consciences of some kind behind those weathered features.

Bubba raised his hand to pull on his lip, and looked confused, but Harry nodded slowly, rumbling, "I know you think the Boss is a bad man, but he's not all bad. He's been good to Bubba and me, and he'll be good to your sister, too. He'll take care of her, just like he took care of us."

Gideon was surprised, wondering what Lucas had done for these men, and he realized his astonishment must have shown on his face as Harry rumbled on, "Me and Bubba ain't exactly the sharpest pencils in the box." His craggy face broke into a rare smile as he said, "The Boss keeps telling us that, but he does it nice, so it's OK. When he met us, me and Bubba were in trouble. We were with some bad people who got us to do things we shouldn't have done. Bubba was caught and was gonna be hanged. The Boss got us out of trouble. He saved Bubba's life. We owe him."

The sincerity in Harry's voice was utterly convincing. Gideon knew there was little hope that he could persuade these men to turn against Lucas and help him, which had been his goal, but he had to try. He spent the next few minutes telling them about the terrible things Lucas had done. About Dureena's baby, about John, even about Angel's husband, Michael.

Gideon had come too close to revealing his knowledge that Lucas had arranged Michael's assassination when he'd been trying to convince Angel to reject Lucas' deal. He knew that if Angel discovered Lucas was behind Michael's death, she would reject him completely. But Gideon also knew that Angel would blame herself. She would know that if she hadn't married Michael, Lucas would never have killed him. When it had come down to it, Gideon had found himself unable to place that burden of guilt on Angel's soul. He never wanted her to know that Michael Healy had died because of his love for, and marriage to, Angel.

All those thoughts raced through Gideon's mind as he tried to convince Harry and Bubba to join him in fighting their boss, but to no avail. Their loyalty was complete. Lucas had saved Bubba's life, and in doing so he had bought their life-long allegiance.

Gideon finally admitted defeat, and opened the door to Deborah's rooms, frantically trying to think of another way out of the mess in which he found himself.

Demon kissed her son's forehead, brushing back his blond curls gently, watching him as he slept. Marcus had hardly roused as she'd undressed him, and got him into his pajamas, then lifted him into bed with his sister and cousins. She now stood and looked down fondly at the sleeping children, silently vowing that whatever happened, no harm would come to them.

She smothered a cry of guilt as she remembered when she had made the same vow to Angel. When Demon had been only twenty-one, she had found Angel, aged just fifteen, standing alone at the side of her mother's grave. Demon had taken her sister into her life and her home, vowing that she would protect Angel from all harm. The bitterness of her repeated failures almost choked the tall blonde.

First, she had failed to protect Angel from David, the man who had seduced Demon, then moved on to her beautiful younger sister, who was only just turned seventeen at the time. Then she had failed to protect Angel from the Vorlons who had abducted them and tortured them.

She hadn't been able to defend Angel from the Brakiri who had awoken them from their sleep in stasis, and tried to rape them. Angel had been the defender then, using her new-found telekinetic powers to protect her sisters.

Demon's ultimate failure had been Lucas. Somehow, she should have found a way to protect Angel from him, to prevent her sister falling under his spell, prevent the pain and suffering Angel had experienced at Lucas' hands. Demon had tried to protect Angel again when she had returned to Eriadne and been captured, along with Lucas, by Matthew. Even then, Demon had failed. Her plan to have Nikarran, her Brakiri friend, free Angel and take her away, protecting her from the legal action Matthew had threatened, had failed utterly. Nikarran's death on Mars had left Angel alone and defenseless.

[Failed, failed, failed. How can I hope to protect my husband and children when I've failed so completely to defend my sister?] Demon had no idea how to respond to her own question, but she knew somehow she had to find an answer.

The tall blonde leaned forward and kissed her daughter's forehead, before straightening and turning to leave the room. She had a long night ahead of her: a night in which she would somehow have to learn to say goodbye to her sister forever.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes

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