

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

by The Space Witches



This battle, Angel has to fight on her own...

Chapter 3

Lucas winced as he headed for his quarters. He slid his hand under his jacket and tentatively touched his chest. It hurt like hell. [That is the last time I go trying to help Batman,] he thought darkly.

Gideon's wounds had been severe. Lucas had seen the look in Harvard's eyes and had known that Gideon was going to die. Well, that just wasn't part of the plan. [Well, at least not anymore.]

If Gideon had died, Angel would've been impossible to control. Lucas wasn't about to have things made more difficult for him than they already were. In order to get on Angel's good side, he'd passed on some of his life force and taken some of Gideon's injury on himself. What really annoyed Lucas wasn't so much the pain he was now going through--that he could use to his advantage--No; it was the fact that he'd had to save Gideon's pathetic excuse for a life to achieve his goal.

Heroism was highly overrated and generally caused Lucas a lot of trouble. Take Bubba. He'd shot Batman under the misguided notion that he was saving Lucas from an assailant. Lucas didn't need saving. He'd have taken Gideon down without shooting him and nearly killing him. Lucas' narrowed

his eyes. He'd have to teach Bubba a lesson--nobody got away with upsetting Lucas Buck's plans.

Reaching his quarters, Lucas searched inside. He smiled when he felt Angel's presence there, admitting to himself that he was relieved to find her so easily. It meant he wouldn't have to search the length and breadth of the castle for her. He could have gone to someone else to run a regenerator over his injury, but getting Angel to do it would be to his advantage. When she saw Lucas' wound and realized how noble and self-sacrificing he'd been in helping to save Gideon, her resistance would weaken and Lucas would be one step closer to getting what he wanted.

Putting a pained expression on his face--which really wasn't hard to do--Lucas opened the door and went inside.

Angel jumped when she heard Lucas calling her name. She found him standing inside the room, but she'd been so lost in thought, she'd not heard him entering. [Will he ever learn to knock?] She wasn't sure she could deal with Lucas yet.

"I know you ain't in the mood for my company right now, darlin. But you can't just ignore me," said Lucas.

"I wouldn't count on it, Lucas," snapped Angel.

Lucas sighed and moved closer. "What happened wasn't my fault."

"Wasn't it? Maybe if you hadn't put me and my family in such an impossible situation, it never would have happened," accused Angel. Deep down she knew she was being unfair. She'd seen the shock on Lucas' face when Bubba had shot Gideon and she'd seen him rush to Gideon's aid. Lucas hadn't wanted Matt to be shot, but Angel needed to blame someone.

[Then blame the Rage.] Her anger toward Lucas suddenly dissipated, as the words sounded in Angel's head. The Rage was to blame for all of this, not Lucas. If she was going keep her side of their deal, she had to make sure she kept the Rage and Lucas--the man she hoped and believed existed beneath the demon--separate in her mind. Her resistance would be toward the evil inside Lucas, not the man beneath. The problem was that Angel wasn't really sure there was any significant difference between the two.

"I never ordered Bubba to shoot Gideon. I ain't stupid, Angel-face. I know what your family means to you. If I'd wanted any one of them dead, I could've arranged for it, and believe me, there wouldn't have been any witnesses."

Angel knew it was the truth. She sighed and looked up at Lucas, saying, "I know."

Lucas came closer and said softly, "Gideon's going to be OK."

Saying nothing, Angel nodded. At least she was certain of that. Luke had said Matt would pull through. She didn't have to worry about Gideon dying and Demon having to go through the same kind of excruciating pain Angel had experienced when she'd lost Michael. Angel knew she'd never have been able to forgive herself if Matt had died.

The sound of Lucas' sharp intake of breath as he sat down beside her drew Angel's attention away from her thoughts of Michael and Gideon. She watched him closely, noticing for the first time that he was slightly pale, and a fine sheen of sweat covered his brow. Her stomach turned. "What's wrong, Lucas? Are you OK?" she asked softly.

Lucas sighed, "Now that you ask, darlin, I've been better. In fact, there's something I need your help with," he said, rising from the seat. Angel frowned and looked at him closely as he removed his jacket, gingerly dropping it over a stiff shoulder. He gave a small grunt as he pulled his shirt out from his jeans and unbuttoned the top few buttons, pushing it aside to reveal the left side of his chest.

Angel gasped at what she saw. A nasty wound marked the flesh of his upper chest, near the shoulder. While it wasn't bleeding, it looked raw and extremely painful. Rising in concern, she made a move to examine the damaged flesh, but Lucas gently grabbed hold of her hand. "I hurt enough without you going and poking at it," he informed her gruffly.

Angel looked up to see genuine pain in Lucas' eyes. Images flashed in her mind at break neck speed--Gideon being shot, Luke trying to help him, Lucas suddenly pushing his way to Gideon's side and dropping to his knees, holding his hand over Gideon's wound. Lucas' eyes had been closed as he'd focused his attention on...On what? Everything had happened so quickly that only now did Angel remember that it was after Lucas had intervened, after she'd moved back to Gideon's side, that Luke and Demon had confirmed that Matt was going to be OK.

"Lucas?" asked Angel tentatively.

Letting go of her hand, Lucas sighed, moved over to sofa and sat down, groaning softly and holding his side as he did so. "I didn't want Gideon to die. His wound was too severe to heal on its own, even with Harvard helping. The only way I could help him was by taking some of his injury on myself, and reduce the damage," answered Lucas.

"How, Lucas?" questioned Angel softly, needing to know how he could do this amazing thing.

"My mother had the ability to heal. I inherited some of that power, but it only works on family. Flyboy and me may be as different as night and day, but when it comes down to it, we're family, so I could take on some of his injury. I saved his life," explained Lucas.

A wave of love, hope and relief surged through Angel. If Lucas could do that, then maybe she really was right about the Rage and the man she loved. Another phrase from Shakespeare sprang into her mind. [There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.]

Angel had seen and done things related to magic that would seem impossible to most people. That was why she didn't doubt Lucas' words. Somehow, through whatever power he had, Lucas had managed to save Gideon's life, but there had clearly been some consequences to himself. Although deep down, her inner voice warned her to be careful. She could never allow herself to forget that Rage, and the way it affected Lucas' behavior.

"Just hold on, Lucas, I'm going to get a regenerator." Angel turned and headed for the bedroom. She couldn't bear the thought of Lucas hurting, not when she could return the favor he'd done for Gideon.

"I was hoping you'd say that, darlin." Lucas' tired voice followed Angel through to the bedroom. She quickly grabbed the regenerator she usually carried with her, and rushed back to Lucas' side.

She knelt in front of him and ordered softly, "Hold your shirt open."

Silently, Lucas complied and Angel lifted the regenerator. She ran it gently over his chest, her hand shaking with emotion as she did so. As she worked the healing device over the wound, Angel couldn't help but be distracted by the sight of Lucas' flat belly, and the soft line of hair that disappeared down beneath the waist of his jeans. She felt herself growing hot. [My god, woman, he's hurt and you're lusting after his body,] she chastised herself.

Angel knew if she allowed the sight of Lucas' body to get to her, there would be no way she'd be able to resist him for long. While she loved Lucas, she wasn't going to let the Rage get what it wanted so easily. She told herself to focus and went to work, finishing running the regenerator over the wound. A little while later, she smiled. The wound was healed and no trace of it remained, not even a scar. She looked up, asking, "How does that feel?"

Lucas gave her a smile that made her stomach somersault and Angel trembled as he reached for her hand, drawing it to his lips and kissing it. "Much better. Thank you."

For a moment Lucas held Angel's eyes with his and her desire to meet his lips with hers was nearly overwhelming. Somehow finding the strength to resist, Angel stood and backed away, her pulse racing frantically.

An awkward silence fell between them, until finally Lucas broke the stillness. "I won't bite, if you come and sit beside me." His lips curled up into a quirky smile.

Angel thought for a moment then decided that some things didn't have to be resisted. Deciding to take one step toward keeping her side of the bargain, Angel nodded and sat down. Lucas turned to her, saying, "I know you ain't happy about all of this, but I promise I'll do right by you."

Angel watched Lucas' face, trying to see if he was sincere or just playing her. She couldn't tell, so she shook her head and said, "No, I'm not happy about it, but I've accepted that this is how it will be."

"I don't just want you to accept this, love. I want you to be happy," said Lucas gently.

"Do you really, Lucas?" questioned Angel, searching his face.

"Of course I do. I know you feel forced into being with me. And yes, I've pushed you into making a choice, but I know you love me, so it can't just be about saving your family. There's more than that to you staying and agreeing to give me a son," challenged Lucas softly.

He was right of course. "Yes, I do love you, Lucas. Sometimes I don't know why. God knows, you've given me enough reason to hate you. But my feelings for you aren't enough to make this a success. I was serious about you having to work to get me into your bed. I need you to prove to me that I'm not making the biggest mistake of my life by not telling you to go to hell."

Angel paused, looking down at her hands as she absently played with the wedding ring she still wore. "My family begged me to not do this. They said we could fight you and stop you from taking Marcus or hurting any of us again. I know you believe you could beat us, but I think that together my family and I would be a force to reckon with. We'd probably have succeeded in stopping you," she told him honestly, looking him in the eyes.

Something flickered in Lucas' eyes, but it was gone before Angel could decide if it was anger or amusement. "But?" he asked softly.

"But my family has been through enough pain because of you and me. It's time to take them out of the equation, and if being with you like this keeps them safe, then I'll do it. If this is how I can be with you, then I'll accept what I can get." [It's better than not having you at all,] she added silently.

Angel lowered her eyes again and continued to play with her wedding ring. She'd not had the heart to take it off after Michael had died. She suddenly felt guilty and sad. Michael had taught her to settle for nothing less than the love and happiness she deserved. If Michael could have talked to her, he would have said that if she couldn't have everything, then she shouldn't be settling for less. But here she was, settling for whatever she could get. [I don't have a choice.] Angel didn't, not when she loved Lucas, and

even forgetting what he wanted from her, she wanted to be with him. She turned the ring around her finger and hoped Michael would forgive her.

Turning to Lucas, Angel was about to say something, but the words died in her throat as she noticed the expression on his face had changed. His eyes had darkened in anger, and his mouth had hardened into a thin line. Startled, she shifted slightly in her seat, not understanding what had changed his mood so suddenly.

"Gee, darlin. So sorry you feel you have to settle for second best," drawled Lucas sarcastically as he stood.

Angel stared at him in confusion. "What are you talking about, Lucas?"

Lucas reached for her, grabbing her left wrist and yanking her up, pulling her off the sofa so quickly she yelped in pain. Angel tried to pull away but his grip was iron tight as he held up her left hand.

"I'm talking about this," said Lucas, suddenly grabbing her ring finger and pulling off her wedding band.

Angel protested and tried to grab for her ring, but Lucas pushed her away.

"Give that back," yelled Angel.

A cruel smile twisted Lucas' face, "Why? You ain't married anymore."

Angel stared at him, fear, panic and anger boiling up inside her. "How dare you!"

Lucas smirked, "Oh, I dare. I ain't second best, darlin', and I sure as hell ain't the marrying kind, so if that's what you're hoping for, I suggest you get over it. "

"I never said I wanted you to marry me, Lucas!" Had he lost his mind? Angel focused on the ring and tried to use her telekinesis to snatch it out of his hands.

She was greeted by laughter when she failed. "Nice try, love. But you ain't getting this back. It's part of your past. It's time you face the future with me, where you really belong." Lucas turned away from her and Angel watched in horror as he walked up to the fireplace and tossed the ring into the flames.

She cried out and ran across the room, intent on trying to rescue her wedding ring, but Lucas grabbed hold of her. He pulled her against him and his lips descended on hers to claim her mouth in a rough, forceful kiss that left her lips bruised.

He let go of her as suddenly as he'd grabbed her, and said with a cold smile, "You belong to me, Angel-face. We've made a deal and I'll live up to it. But you remember this. I don't compete with ghosts--not anymore. This can be good, but you'd better accept that things won't be as they were with your husband, and you don't play games with me." Lucas turned and walked to the door, pausing long enough to say in a low, dangerous drawl, "I'm as patient as the next man, Angel-face, but I have my limits. In the end, I'll get what I want, but I'd rather get it without a struggle. I can make you happy, if you accept me for who I am and not who you want me to be. It's up to you."

With that he was gone, slamming the door behind him. Angel stood for a moment, too stunned to move, then she remembered her wedding ring. Turning in desperation, she picked up a poker from beside the fireplace and began a frenzied search for her ring amongst the wood and coal, trying to fish it out before the intense heat of the fire melted the soft gold band.

Sometime later, having doused the flames with water, Angel searched the burnt embers. She was

covered in ash, but she refused to concede defeat. The flames hadn't been hot enough to vaporize the gold. There must be something left. Finally, she felt the tip of the poker strike something hard. Scrabbling through the ashes, she broke her nails on hard bits of clinker as she groped for the thing that had given out a tiny metallic sound.

Her fingertips touched something hard and hot, and heedless of the pain, Angel pulled out the scorching lump of metal. All that remained of her wedding ring was a single, small lump of gold. She collapsed on the floor before the fire and sobbed. Her wedding ring, the symbol of her marriage to Michael, was lost forever. She stared into the fireplace, numbly wondering how the ring had melted so quickly. [He must have made it burn.] Somehow, Angel knew Lucas must have caused the flames to be hot enough to liquefy the metal in so short a time. Another sob tore free from her and she blamed herself for its destruction.

Lucas had been right; she had been hoping he could be like Michael, Angel hadn't wanted to admit it to herself, but it was the truth, and somehow Lucas had known. Still, his reaction had frightened her. Angel didn't want to look too closely at what had driven him to destroy her ring. All she could do was turn her anger onto the thing she believed had driven him to that cruel act--the Rage. She vowed that one day she'd make the Rage pay.

Rising from the floor, Angel clutched the cooling lump of metal in her filthy hand. Oblivious to the mess she was making, she wiped away her tears. She had to be strong, and she'd be damned if she'd let the Rage win. It may drive Lucas' actions, but she'd engage it in a battle that it hadn't counted on. It would get what it wanted, its precious heir, but she'd get what she wanted too--the Lucas she believed existed beneath the demon.

Now she just had to find a place where she could hide her tiny lump of gold, her only reminder of her life with Michael and their love. A place where Lucas would never, ever find it.

Lucas stalked down the corridor. He was furious. Part of his anger was directed at Angel, who had pissed him off. He'd risked his life to save Batman and she'd not even thanked him for it. Even her sister had thanked him. Lucas smiled as he remembered Demon's gratitude. At least one woman in that family knew who she was indebted to. But instead of thanking him, Angel had started pining for her dead husband. [Ungrateful witch!]

Lucas was even more angry with himself, for letting his anger get the better of him. That seemed to be happening more and more often, and it had to stop. He never lost control! It was all Michael Healy's fault. The man was dead and still he was getting in the way, making Angel wish for something she couldn't have. That damn Michael was making Lucas' job all the more difficult. He knew he would get Angel in the end, but he was damned if he'd become like a Healy to do it! It seemed having had Michael killed wasn't enough. Lucas chewed his lip. If only he could drive the ghost of Angel's dead husband from her heart and mind forever. What was it with ghosts always getting in his way? Hadn't he been punished enough by having Merly Ann haunt him and thwart him in his previous life?

All his well laid plans were turning to shit. Angel was being more resistant than he thought she would be. She'd become more strong-willed while out of his control, and Lucas blamed her family and her husband for that. Trust them to go and spoil her by making her stronger, and encouraging her to think she deserved better than Lucas. Didn't they know Angel belonged to him and deserved only him?

Well, he'd gotten rid of her husband and now he'd gotten rid of her family, but even that had nearly gone wrong and fouled things up for him. By being nice to her family, Lucas knew he'd scored brownie points with Angel. He'd have loved to kill the lot of them, and get rid of the threat they posed

to him, but for Angel, he'd restrained himself.

Then that big damned ape of man--who made a pot plant look like it had the intelligence of Einstein--had nearly ruined things for him. If Lucas hadn't done what he did to save Gideon, Angel would have been impossible to control and Lucas would have had to go about things the hard way.

While the Rage wasn't against doing things that way, Lucas had to be honest with himself. He'd rather Angel came willingly to his bed because she loved him and couldn't resist him, rather than by force. He'd done that before to get an heir, and it hadn't exactly worked to his advantage. Besides, the thought of raping Angel left a distinctly bad taste in his mouth.

Lucas turned his thoughts back to what had just happened. He'd reacted stupidly and let his jealousy of Michael Healy get the better of him. But when he'd seen Angel playing with the wedding ring, he'd lost it. He'd probably just done more damage than Bubba had. At least Angel didn't blame him for Bubba shooting Flyboy, but she might never forgive him for destroying her wedding ring. Now he'd have to start from scratch at getting on her good side. Lucas narrowed his eyes. He shouldn't have to work this hard, and he wanted to make someone pay for all of the trouble he was going through.

A twisted grin spread across Lucas' face as he found the perfect target for venting his anger. There was one person who had contributed to nearly fucking up his plans. Bubba. Lucas needed to get control of his anger so that he could focus on being nice to Angel. There was only one way to do that and that was to make someone suffer.

Lucas stopped, closed his eyes and searched with his mind. He opened his eyes and smiled when he located Bubba just outside the castle walls, in the orchard. Bubba was alone. Perfect.

Moving like a wild animal stalking its prey, Lucas left the castle grounds, pausing only to give instructions to Sol and Harry to start preparations for moving out of the castle. That would keep them occupied while Lucas took his revenge. When he entered the orchard it didn't take him long to locate Bubba, who was picking fruit. Lucas scanned the immediate vicinity, a slow smile spreading on his lips when he found no one else around. There would be no witnesses.

Lifting his eyes to the sky, Lucas closed his eyes and again searched with his mind, a cruel smirk on his lips as he found what he needed. It was far away, high up in the hills above the area of land cleared by the Vorlon when they had built the castle. It didn't want to leave its nest, but it couldn't resist the power of Lucas' call. Focusing his mind, Lucas summoned one of the planet's most vicious life forms. Their claws contained deadly venom that could easily kill a grown man, even of Bubba's great size, and their beaks could slash their prey to ribbons.

When he finally heard the wild avian's cry in response, Lucas opened his eyes and watched. Bubba's hand froze in mid air and his head fell back as he searched the sky. Lucas smiled, seeing the fear in Bubba's eyes as he spotted the flyer. Bubba may not have been on the planet long enough to know about all of the dangerous life-forms, but he recognized a predator when he saw one.

Lucas watched as Bubba tried to seek cover under the fruit tree, trying to hide as the bird of prey swooped down and dived bombed him. Bubba let out a shriek and started swiping at the flyer as it began its attack, but there was nothing he could do to prevent the long, sharp claws slashing into his upper arms, neck and face.

The bird continued its frenzied attack on Bubba as he started to run, trying to flee from his attacker. Bubba stumbled and fell to the ground. The bird let out a terrible shriek, then continued its attack on the helpless man, driven on by its own instincts and by the power of the mind watching, relishing its viciousness.

Lucas finally called the avian off. With one final slash of its claws, the terrible creature rose up into the sky and vanished. Chewing his lip, Lucas watched Bubba crying out for help, as he tried to stagger to his feet. He soon collapsed to the ground, bleeding from the terrible gashes on his body. Lucas knew it wouldn't take long for the bird's poison to start taking effect. He wasn't disappointed. Almost at once, Bubba began writhing in pain on the ground, his body wracked by the convulsions that tore through his body. Blood oozed from the big man's mouth and nose, as he gasped for breath.

Leaning against a tree, Lucas watched, curious to see what effect the bird's poison would have on a human. He'd heard what happened to Brakiri who were attacked in this way, and he was fairly sure that human and Brakiri body chemistry was similar enough to create an analogous reaction in Bubba. Lucas wasn't disappointed.

As Bubba's body convulsed, Lucas cocked his head to one side, watching carefully. He gave a small wince as he heard the sound of a bone snapping. Bubba's body had twisted at such an extreme angle that the strength of his muscles had broken his own bone. Lucas whistled softly to himself as he saw the bone of Bubba's left arm sticking out through the flesh. [Well, ain't that something!]

It didn't take long for the poison to burn its way through Bubba's body. Bubba's convulsions finally started to die down into small twitches, until finally he went still. Much to Lucas' disappointment, it hadn't been a long, lingering death, but it had at least appeared excruciatingly painful.

Lucas' lips curled into a cruel grin, and then he turned and sauntered out of the orchard. Everyone would think that Bubba's death had been a terrible accident. After all, everyone knew the dangers of going outside of the castle walls and not keeping an eye out for the deadly flyers.

Feeling much better, Lucas entered the Castle. Now that Bubba was taken care of, he could once again focus on Angel and getting her where she belonged. In his bed.

Demon leaned forward and stroked her son's golden curls with her fingers, making sure she held all her emotions deep down inside her, where even Marcus couldn't feel them. She knew that sometime she'd have to acknowledge those feelings, and deal with them before they tore her apart. But not right now. Now her son needed her to be strong.

Marcus had been strong for his mother after they'd taken off from Eriadne, with John piloting the ship, while Luke stayed with Matthew in the cabin Demon and her husband had shared on the voyage out. Lily and Demon had strapped the children into their seats, then tried to deal with the outburst of hysterical demands from Mattie. The task was made doubly difficult for Demon as she felt her final mental link to Angel disintegrating in her head.

The tall blonde wanted to scream out loud, to beg John to return to the planet below, but she knew that was impossible. For now, she just had to deal with the pain, and do her best to quiet Mattie's tantrum. The little girl had emerged from the shock of seeing her father hurt, and had demanded to be taken to him, screaming for her Daddy, over and over. Nothing and no-one had been able to comfort Mattie, although Demon and Marcus had tried to project cool waves of calmness, in an attempt to ease the little girl's panic.

Dasha had joined in with their efforts, but it was only when John emerged from the control room, and linked his mind with the others, that they had finally succeeded in soothing Mattie enough for her to sleep. Demon had then carried her troublesome daughter into the cabin the little girl shared with her brother, and put her to bed.

Returning to the main lounge, Demon had found the other children yawning. It had been a traumatic

day for them all, and the children needed little encouragement to retire, even though it was barely late afternoon by the time at the castle on Eriadne. Lily had briskly supervised the bed-time ablutions, while Demon and John had tiptoed into the cabin where Luke had still watched over Matthew's comatose form.

The sight of her husband, pale and unconscious, had shaken Demon's resolution badly. She'd let out a small whimper of pain, and she knew from the grimace on John's face that just for a moment she'd let her control slip. With a whispered apology, Demon had pulled herself together and asked Luke quietly, "How is he?"

Luke had smiled up at her. "He's going to be fine. He should wake up soon. Why don't you stay with him?"

Demon had swallowed the lump in her throat and forced a small smile of thanks to her face. "I'll just say goodnight to Marcus and make sure he's asleep. Then I'll come back." It had taken all of Demon's willpower to walk out of the cabin and leave her husband at that moment, but she knew her son needed her. Marcus had been very subdued since they'd taken off, and Demon suspected it was something more than the events of the day that were troubling him.

So she sat on the edge of her son's bed, and tousled his curls affectionately, causing him to grumble and swipe at her hand. It was an old game between them. Marcus insisted that he was too old for his mother's caresses, but Demon knew it wasn't true. When Marcus was sad, her touch reassured and relaxed him.

After a few moments of silence between them, Demon said softly, "There's something bothering you. Not just your father's injury. Something else. Do you want to talk about it?"

Marcus lay still, with his eyes shut for a moment. When he opened them and looked up at her, Demon could see that her son's golden eyes--so like his father's--were filled with confusion and fear. She leaned forward and hugged him fiercely, trying to make him feel safe and loved again. After a few seconds, Marcus pushed her away and started to speak quietly.

"Ever since I was little I've had a dream. Not a lot, just now and then, but always the same. It was odd and scary, so I never told you about it. I think I understand it more now, but it still doesn't make sense." The young boy fell silent for a moment, frowning in concentration. Demon reached out and took his hand, squeezing it silently, encouraging him to proceed.

"There was a man in my dream who looked like Dad, but he wasn't Dad. I don't know how I knew that, but somehow I did. The man held his hand out to me and said, 'It's your choice, son. Choose my way and you can have anything you want.' I knew he was telling the truth, but he was really scary, and somehow I knew he was bad, so I didn't want to go with him, even though he looked like Dad. So I ran away, but he kept calling after me, 'Choose, Marcus. Choose me.' And no matter how far or fast I ran he was always just behind me."

Demon hugged her son again, but still said nothing, feeling his fear and anxiety, sending waves of soothing calm while she waited for him to go on. Eventually, Marcus quieted enough to continue.

"I think the man in my dream was Sheriff Buck. He's the bad man who looked like Dad, who wanted me to be like him. But I never met him before, so how could I dream about him?"

Demon swallowed hard. This was difficult. She thought she knew the answer to Marcus' question, but she wasn't sure he would understand her answer, and she was worried she might frighten him badly. But she couldn't lie to him. As an empath, he would detect her lie instantly. She decided she owed her son something of an explanation at least, but that she would try to make it as factual and

non-frightening as she could.

"Actually, you have met Lucas before, but you were a tiny baby. Just a couple of days old."

Marcus' eyes opened wide at this revelation. "Was he there when I was born, then?"

Demon nodded. "Lucas was pretty much responsible for you being born when you were." With a sigh, and all the time send waves of love and calm, the tall blonde told her son of the events of the night of his birth. How Lucas had come to kidnap her, how Matthew had stopped him, and the ensuing fight, during which Lucas had been injured. Most importantly, how Lucas had grabbed Demon and through his touch, had made a mental link to Marcus, still inside her.

"He touched your mind, Marcus. He tried to forge a link with you, a link like the one we have." She smiled gently and caressed her son's hair again, sending through their link, *[He tried to break our link, but we fought him. Even though you weren't even born, you helped me break the link Lucas was trying to make. But the effort woke you up, and you wanted out of me, right then and there. You weren't due for another month, but somehow Lucas' touch had made you restless. So out you came, impatient as ever.]*

Marcus' eyes were wide open with amazement, his mouth a round O of astonishment at the story of his birth. Then he frowned and whispered, "Does that make me bad? Did the Sheriff make me bad when he touched me?"

Demon was fierce as she sent back, *[No! Absolutely not! You are your father's son and no child of Matthew's could ever be bad.]* She sent the words with utter conviction, knowing that she was twisting what she sent to make it literally true, but misleading. Marcus would spot a lie instantly, but he wouldn't understand prevarication. Realizing her fierceness had startled her son, Demon smiled and said, "Well, no male child anyway. I'm not so sure about his daughter."

She looked across at the bed where Mattie slept, a picture of angelic innocence. Marcus gave a soft giggle. "She's not that bad, Mum. Just a bit noisy at times."

Demon snorted. "A bit? Hmm, I think she's the one we should nickname 'Demon'."

Marcus giggled again, then snuggled under the quilt and yawned. "Thanks for telling me about Sheriff Buck. It makes sense now. I wonder if I'll ever have that dream again." His voice was slow and sleepy.

Demon leaned forward and kissed his forehead, whispering, "If you do, just tell him, 'No'. Tell him you've made your choice."

A slurred, "Night, Mummy," was the only response she got as Marcus slipped into sleep.

Demon sat for a few minutes longer, looking at her sleeping children, wondering how she would have found the strength to go on being a mother to them if she had lost Matthew. Then she took a deep breath and stood. She had done her duties. Now she could do what she had longed to do since setting foot on the flyer. She could go to Matthew.

Sitting on the bed at Matthew's side, Demon held onto his right hand tightly and watched him sleep. Luke had bound Matthew's left arm across his chest, and the quilt only covered him to the waist, leaving his stomach and shoulders bared to her view. The tall blonde leaned forward and gently kissed her husband's cheek, brushing back a strand of hair that had fallen forward over his forehead. She

then dropped her head to rest on his hand and started to weep, silently.

She finally let go of her grief at the loss of her sister, her frustration at her inability to stop Lucas taking Angel from them, the pain from the breaking of her mental link to Angel, and the fear that had been held deep inside her from the moment she had seen the PPG shot strike Matthew in the chest. Demon had somehow frozen herself into immobility at that moment, and only now did she release all the emotions she should have felt since. Only now when she was alone with Matthew did she feel safe enough to let her weakness and her sorrow show.

After a few moments, she felt Matthew's hand move under hers, and she looked up abruptly. Matthew's eyes were open, and he had a gentle smile on his face. His hand moved to cup her cheek and Demon watched as he licked his lips, then tried to speak. She let go of his hand and lifted a cup of water from the side of the bed, positioning it so he could sip from the straw. When Matthew had drunk a little, he laid his head back on the pillow and tried to speak again. His voice was rough and croaky, but Demon could understand his words as he said, "Don't cry. I hate it when you cry. It usually means I've done something incredibly stupid."

Torn between laughter and tears, Demon choked out, "Well, you *did* do something stupid, but I'll try to stop crying now you're awake."

Lifting Matthew's hand to her cheek, Demon closed her eyes and rubbed her face against his fingers, needing the warmth of his touch against her skin to reassure her that he was still alive. She felt his hand move across her face, wiping away the tears, and she opened her eyes as he spoke again. "We're in space, aren't we? Where's Angel? Did you get her away from Lucas?"

Demon shook her head, tears starting to flow down her cheeks again. She felt as if there was a raw wound deep inside her, and just the sound of her sister's name reopened that wound and revived the pain.

Matthew started to swear softly, and he tried to sit up, then groaned with the pain from his shoulder. Demon pushed him tenderly back down onto the bed, and held him there with the gentle pressure of her hand. "Don't move. Luke said the wound is healing well, but you could still rip it apart if you try to move around too soon. Matthew, please understand this. It hurts me as much as it hurts you, but a part of Angel wants to be with Lucas. He may have blackmailed her, and a big part of her reason for staying was to save Marcus and protect us all, but she really loves Lucas, Matthew. God help her, but she really loves him."

As she spoke, the tears slid down her face, and again Matthew lifted his free hand to brush them away with his fingers. Demon took his hand and kissed it, then held onto it, squeezing it as she went on. "I wish it were different. I wish Lucas didn't exist and that we'd never unleashed him on the universe, but I think the only way that could have been prevented was if you'd never come to Eriadne. Sometimes I even wonder whether that would have been best. Maybe we'd all have been happier if we'd never met."

Demon didn't really believe her own words and the pain she saw in her husband's eyes echoed hers as he contradicted her vehemently. "No! How can you say that? How could you even think that any of us would have been happier apart? Do you think I could have lived without you? I can't even conceive of what my life would have been like. Alone. Without you and the kids. Well, I guess we both can conceive of that, because we know what would have happened if we'd never met. Our universe would have ended like Jack Gideon's. In destruction."

Sighing deeply, Demon remembered her husband's alter-ego, the man from the parallel universe, who they had called Jack Gideon to distinguish him from the original. She had helped him escape the

Minbari who had wanted to interrogate him, and he had kept the promise he'd made to her then. He had kept in contact with her, unbeknownst to any of her family. She alone knew where Jack was.

Matthew looked up at her, and Demon could feel his pain and confusion as he asked, "Do you really wish we'd never met? I know I've hurt you, more than once, but..."

Before he could continue, Demon leaned forward and kissed him, allowing all her passion for him, her love and her lust, to pour out into the kiss, demonstrating clearly how she felt, in a way she could never express in words.

When they finally broke for breath, Matthew used his uninjured right arm to pull Demon down next to him, until she lay by his side, her head resting on his uninjured shoulder, and his arm around her. For the first time in days, Demon relaxed, allowing herself to revel in the warmth of her husband's embrace. They lay silently for a while, then Matthew kissed the top of her head and asked, "How long was I out for? And what happened? I remember rushing at Lucas, then feeling something hit me like the kick of a mule. Then not much else until I woke up here."

Demon snuggled into his chest and explained what had happened. Matthew was incredulous when she explained how Lucas had saved his life, but eventually had to accept that there was no way in which he could have survived a shot to the upper chest from a PPG rifle without some miraculous intervention. Demon then went on to explain what had happened since they left Eriadne.

"John flew us out of there, and tried to activate the hyperlink to the Excalibur. Not surprisingly, Lucas had sabotaged the communications equipment. John thinks he can fix it, but it will take several hours. He's working on it now, although we tried to get him to go to bed and get some sleep before he started. But you know what John's like. He'll run himself into the ground before he'll admit that he's tired. He says that as soon as he has it fixed, he'll call for the Excalibur and we'll go back to Eriadne with G'Tan and his Marines."

Demon sighed deeply as she remembered John's words. The telepath Captain had been determined to rescue his sister-in-law from the hands of her kidnapper, but they all knew that he would be too late. In the couple of days it would take the Excalibur to reach them, Lucas and Angel would leave Eriadne. By the time the Excalibur arrived they would be long gone. And Lucas had eluded his pursuers for seven years. There was little chance he'd be found now, when he'd finally got what he'd always wanted.

Demon felt Matthew kiss her hair, but he said nothing. She felt all his guilt and anger, bubbling inside him, and she turned to kiss his shoulder again. "Please don't feel like that. There's nothing you can do. There's nothing any of us can do. Lucas is like a virus Angel has to get out of her system. I can only hope that it's not a fatal infection, but I'll probably never know."

With those words, Demon broke down again, and cried into her husband's shoulder. He held her, kissed her, and comforted her until the storm of tears passed and she was calm once more. The tall blonde sat up straight and rubbed her face, all too aware that she probably looked terrible, with bloodshot red eyes and blotchy skin. With one last sniff, Demon shook herself and said briskly, "OK, that's enough. No use crying over spilt milk, is there? Now, are you hungry? It's been a long time since breakfast and you need to get your strength back. If you don't get better quickly, I'm likely to get frustrated, and go looking for company. I'm not sure John and Luke would survive having to keep me and Lily happy at the same time."

Matthew gave a weak laugh and kissed her hand again. "If you've got something that will slide down easily, I could eat. I feel as weak as a kitten at the moment, and there's no way I'm going to keep you satisfied in this condition."

Demon laughed and went to stand, but Matthew held her hand tightly for a moment, looking up at

her anxiously. Demon could feel his guilt as he said quietly, "What Lucas said. About me and..."

Demon placed her fingers on his lips and silenced him. "Lucas didn't tell me anything I didn't already know. He just phrased it in a particularly nasty way. He's good at that: twisting things that come from kindness and love into ugliness and evil. I almost feel sorry for him. He'll never know what it's like to love a woman in the way you do. To share comfort with a woman who is sad, and to give her what she needs most. That's something I love about you, not something I'm jealous of. Lucas will never understand that."

With one last kiss, Demon rose and left the cabin, holding her head high, telling herself that as long as she had Matthew and her children, she could survive without her sister. She told herself that over and over again, hoping that eventually she would come to believe it.

Gideon lay back on the bed, feeling weak and exhausted. He knew it had been stupid to charge at Lucas in the way he had, but he hadn't been able to stop himself. He'd needed to wipe that sneer from Lucas' smug face. After that, everything was a blur, up to the moment he'd awoken in his cabin, with Deborah crying softly, wetting his hand with her tears.

Except there was one thing that wasn't a blur: one moment when everything had been crystal clear. He had lain on the ground and he'd known he was going to die. He'd felt the life draining out of him, and he'd wanted to scream out at the injustice of it all. Just when his life was opening up again, just when he and Deborah had come together again, more in love with each other than ever before, now it was all being taken away.

At that moment, Gideon had forced his eyes open, and he'd looked up into Angel's face. She'd been bending over him, looking more beautiful than he'd even seen her, crying, her crystal blue eyes dimmed with tears. He'd wanted to tell her not to cry, that he wasn't worth her tears, but he'd been unable to speak. Angel had leaned forward and whispered to him, "Please don't die, Matt. I love you too much to lose you like this. Don't leave me like Michael did."

Gideon's heart had almost broken at her words, and the sight of her tears rolling down her beautiful face, but he'd been unable to reply. He'd finally lost consciousness, knowing that he was dying. He'd felt the ultimate failure, unable to do the last thing Angel had asked of him.

Lying on his back on the bed, Gideon made a vow. One day he'd find Angel. One day he'd make sure she was happy. If that meant giving her up, then so be it. But one day he was going to make sure Angel got the happiness she deserved.

"Angel... WHAT?"

Ilas' face on the screen in Lily's cabin twisted with a mix of fear, hatred, and anger. The shock was so great that the shape-shifter's form shivered, and Lily watched helplessly as her youngest sister changed from her usual pale, blue-haired and purple-eyed appearance to her real form: slightly sturdier with lavender hair and red cat's eyes, the scar on her right cheek standing out from her pale complexion.

Since the Witches had been awakened from stasis by the Brakiri on Eriadne, there had been few occasions when Ilas had lost control over herself so completely. And out of those times, only once had she been conscious when it happened: four years ago, after the Excalibur's mission to Centauri Prime, when she had found out that Demon carried a Vorlon inside her.

The previous evening, Lily and Luke had been making tea in the small galley when Demon had entered to get her husband something to eat. The tall blonde had told Luke that Matthew had awoken and sent his thanks to the doctor for his help. After inquiring about John's progress with the communications equipment, Demon had asked for a moment alone with Lily. When Luke had left them, squeezing Demon's hand encouragingly as he walked past her, Demon had taken Lily aside and said softly, "We have to tell Ilas."

Lily had seen in her sister's golden-brown eyes how much she dreaded having to do this, but they both knew that their littlest sister would have to know.

"Let me do it," Lily had finally said, "I'm closest to her. You concentrate on Matthew now." At first, Demon seemed ready to protest--as the oldest, she had always felt responsible for her sisters, especially for Ilas, who was almost like a daughter to her, but when Lily kept looking at her levelly, the tall blonde had smiled sadly and hugged the little red-head, sending her heartfelt thanks through their link.

John had worked on the communications equipment feverishly during the night, only getting a few hours' rest, when he hadn't been able to see clearly anymore due to exhaustion. He'd finished the repairs an hour before, and was now in the control room, piloting a course to the rendezvous point he'd agreed with the Excalibur. Somehow it seemed impossible that less than a day had gone by since they had left Eriadne--had left Angel behind. It seemed like an eon to Lily, yet the pain was still fresh and raw, like an open wound.

Lily wished there had been a way to break the horrible news to Ilas gently, but in the end she had known that nothing could ease the blow, so she had given her sister a very condensed version of what had happened, keeping the details for later, when Ilas would have calmed down somewhat.

Lily's thoughts were brought back to the present by her baby sister's voice. "Have you gone completely mad? How could you leave her behind?" Ilas snarled, looking at Lily accusingly. "How could you leave her in the hands of that monster?"

Before she could rant on, Lily snapped, "Do you think it was easy for us? Do you think we enjoyed leaving Angel in the hands of the man who will probably be her undoing?" Her voice almost broke and she swallowed a sob. Forcing herself to calm down, she took a deep breath, letting her head drop to her hands for a moment. [Ilas is only expressing the guilt I feel myself; I have no right to shout at her.]

Finally, Lily looked at her younger sister again. "I'm sorry, Ilas. I shouldn't have shouted. It's just..." The tiny red-head took a shuddering breath, before continuing in a whisper, "I feel so helpless. On the one hand I think we should have done something to prevent this from happening, but I also know that it was Angel's choice to make. We don't..."

"But surely you'll go back to Eriadne as soon as you reach the Excalibur, won't you? To free Angel?" Ilas cut in.

"No," a tired voice said from the doorway. Lily turned to see John enter the cabin, looking worn and sad. He took Lily's hand as he sat down beside her on the sofa, and said quietly, "There's nothing I'd like more, Ilas, believe me. But we won't be able to rendezvous with the Excalibur for another three days at least. I'm sure that by now, Lucas has already taken Angel away from Eriadne--he wouldn't stay a moment longer than he has to. And he's too smart to leave behind any trace that could lead us to his hiding place. Besides," John overruled Ilas' protest, "even if there was a chance of finding them, we can't employ ISA resources to do it. If Lucas had abducted Angel, things would be different, but the fact is that she decided to stay with Lucas of her own free will."

John twisted his mouth; Lily could hear the bitterness in his voice, and see the defeat in his eyes--clearly he'd been arguing that point with someone, and lost.

"Of her own free will? She only did it to protect us all from him, you know that! And you want to thank her by just abandoning her?" Ilas was looking at John wide-eyed with exasperation.

Lily sighed. "Yes, part of Angel's reason for agreeing to stay with Lucas was that she wanted to protect us all, Marcus in particular. But, Ilas, no matter what he did to her--to us--Lucas is like a poison in Angel's veins. All these years she hasn't been able to get over him. Despite everything he did, she still loves him. Maybe... maybe this is the only way she can get him out of her blood."

Ilas just looked at Lily silently for several seconds, finally whispering, "I... I guess I knew. I just hoped that when she married Michael..." She closed her eyes, sighing, then opened them again, her red cat's eyes moving from Lily to John. "Is there nothing at all that we can do then?"

"I may not be able to officially use ISA resources, but I'll do whatever I can to find Angel and Lucas. I know Marcus Cole will want to help us when we let him know what's happened. We won't give up, not until we've found Angel." John's voice was solemn, and Ilas accepted his vow with a curt nod.

"Max will try to get information through his contacts, and Dureena, too. Ask anything you need of us, no matter what." The shape-shifter's voice was hard and full of determination, but softened slightly as she turned to Lily and said, "Now tell me exactly what happened."

Lily nodded, forcing back the tears that had threatened to rise. None of them had said it, but they all knew that the chances of finding Angel were slim. [I mustn't let despair take over. There's always hope,] she told herself firmly. [And now I have a story to tell, and a message to convey.]

Taking a deep breath, Lily launched into the story.

Angel stood on the battlements of the castle and watched the activity below. Her stomach knotted anxiously. Crates were being packed and taken down to a ship beyond the castle walls. She knew what it meant--they would soon be leaving Eriadne. Angel chewed on a nail and told herself she wasn't going to cry. She couldn't fight this. She just had to accept it and deal with it.

Abandoning her nail, she surveyed her fingers. Her ring finger looked bare without her wedding ring, a white band showing where she had worn it for so long. Sighing, she stuck her hand in the pocket of her leather pants, gaining some comfort from the small mangled nugget of what remained of her ring. While the remains gave her the ability in some small way not to hate Lucas for what he'd done, it didn't stop her from hating the Rage. She'd spent a sleepless night damning it and calling it every foul name under the sun. Lucky for Lucas he'd not come near her the whole day. There would have been no accounting her actions had he dared to bother her so soon after the night before.

She could only hope that he was avoiding her out of guilt. [Come on! Lucas wouldn't know guilt if it walked up to him and smacked him on the nose,] sneered her inner self. Angel smiled at the thought; she'd pay good money to see that. Hell, she'd have loved to do it herself. [Ha! Yeah right, then you'd feel bad and want to kiss him better.]

Angel scowled and told her inner voice if it didn't shut up she'd bitch-slap it. It went blissfully silent. She was having a hard enough time dealing with her own doubts; she didn't need her conscience giving her grief about Lucas.

The fact that her inner voice was right wasn't a factor. True, she'd want to kiss Lucas better. She loved him. The Rage on the other hand...If she could see it tortured to death, she would. It was to blame for all of this. It was the evil that drove Lucas to cruelty. It had almost taken the symbol of her marriage to Michael from her. A small triumphant smile crept across her lips, as she wondered what the Rage

would think if it knew she still held on to what remained of her ring.

Angel watched Lucas' men going about their business below, and again cursed the Rage under her breath. She knew they were preparing to leave because of it. Obviously it wouldn't want them to stay where her family might find them. The Rage wasn't stupid. [Unfortunately. And neither is Lucas.] It knew that her sisters and their partners would regroup and try to rescue Angel. Her family had never really accepted her sacrifice for their safety, even if she'd told them that was what she had to do.

Sighing, Angel told herself to be grateful to the Rage for wanting them to leave. Her family would be safer as long as they didn't know where she and Lucas were going. Still, she hated the demon inside Lucas and refused to be grateful to it for anything.

Again, Angel damned the Rage and under her breath, called it numerous names that would have made even Demon's extensive vocabulary look like that of a nun. The raven-haired witch told it what it could go do with itself.

"Well, darlin', I didn't know that was anatomically possible," drawled a voice behind her.

Jumping, Angel swung around to find Lucas leaning nonchalantly against the wall, one leg bent slightly, arms folded and a half smile on his lips. Dressed in black jeans, green silk shirt and a tan suede jacket, he was the most gorgeous and sexually appealing thing she'd ever seen in her life. He oozed sex appeal. [Sex on legs,] she thought, drinking in the sight of him. Angel dragged her attention away from her desire for Lucas and gave him a cold glare.

"I'd be happy to draw you a picture, Lucas, and then maybe you can go and prove to yourself that it is possible to shove your head up your own ass."

Pushing himself away from the wall, Lucas whistled. "Not in a good mood today, love?"

Angel shot him a scathing look as he moved past her to look down at the activity below. "What do you expect after what you did last night, Lucas?"

Angel watched him closely and for a moment she thought she saw regret in his eyes, then it was gone as he shrugged. The callousness of that small movement felt like a knife twisting in her stomach.

"That's your past. I'm your present and your future. I won't have anything getting in the way," explained Lucas coldly.

"You are unbelievable," accused Angel incredulously.

"What do you want me to say, darlin'?"

"You could say you're sorry, Lucas! Isn't it enough that I've agreed to give you an heir? You also have to take away everything that's ever meant anything to me?" Angel waited for him to say something. When he didn't, she persisted. "What you did was uncalled for and cruel. If that's how you expect to win me over, you'd better think about changing your strategy, because I won't accept that kind of treatment. I deserve better and you had no right to destroy my wedding ring. No right!" yelled Angel, letting her emotions get the better of her. Suddenly unable to stand being around Lucas, she turned on her heel, intent on fleeing the battlements.

A strong hand grabbed her arm and she was swung around to face Lucas. "Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. I'll live up to my part of the deal. But it will be a hell of a lot easier without reminders of your marriage getting in the way. That's why I got rid of it. I want your undivided attention, Angel-face. I'll expect and accept nothing less," Lucas face was inches from hers as he spoke, his tone controlled.

"You'll have that. You didn't have to destroy my wedding ring to get it," she said, wrenching her arm free of his hold. She knew Lucas could read her thoughts if he remained in physical contact. She had to keep what she had in her pocket a secret.

"Maybe not. But it's gone now, so I suggest you get over it," responded Lucas coldly.

The desire to punch him in the face was strong, but Angel stopped herself. Turning away from him, she closed her eyes. She told herself it was the Rage saying those things, not Lucas. However, it wasn't easy to convince herself, not when she wondered if the ring had been thrown into the fire out of jealousy. To feel jealous, you had to have feelings. The Rage had no feelings except hate. So that left the man. Shaking her head, Angel told herself that wasn't it., Lucas was still too much under the control of the Rage to let his true feelings for her reveal themselves in a jealous act. No, the Rage had simply acted out of spite and to force her to pay attention to what it wanted from her.

Sighing, she turned and look at Lucas sadly. "I can't get over it, Lucas, but I'll accept it's gone and I'll hold you to your part of the deal. But know this, do anything like that again and you'll regret it," she warned.

An eyebrow shot up in amusement at her threat, [Smug bastard!] then Lucas nodded. "Trust me, Angel, it won't happen again." Was it her imagination or did he sound sincere? Silence stretched between them as they stared at each other.

Finally, Lucas broke their eye contact and turned back to watch the activity below for a moment before saying quietly, "We'll be leaving tomorrow, so if there's anything you want to take with you, I suggest you get packing."

Forcing herself to breathe and remain calm, Angel nodded then asked, "Where are we going?"

"You'll find out soon enough. We leave first thing in the morning." Lucas pushed himself away from the battlement and headed for the door. He paused to look back at her, chewing the inside of his lip before continuing, "Don't keep me waiting."

Staring at his back as he disappeared, Angel shook her head in dismay, before turning to look out over the battlement again. He'd been so cold toward her. Not exactly the kind of attitude to have when he was supposed to be courting her. Angel sighed. She suspected he'd turn on the charm once they reached their destination.

Angel gazed up into the sky, wondering what lay ahead and whether, when it was all said and done, if she could really do this. A shiver ran through her as she recalled their deal. If she was proved wrong about Lucas, and couldn't stay with him after she'd given him his son, would she be able to walk away from her own child? Could she ever leave the man she loved? Was he so deeply ingrained in her being that the only way for her to get away from him was death? She wasn't ready to deal with that. Angel shook her head and buried those thoughts deep down, until she was ready to face them if and when she had to.

She searched the sky, her thoughts turning to Michael, wondering if he were watching over her, praying that he was. She turned her eyes to that part of the sky where she knew Earth was located. Would she ever see Earth and her family again?

It would have been so easy to start crying, as she remembered all the things she would have to leave behind, and the life she had built back on Earth, but she lifted her chin defiantly. The Rage had won her tears too many times. She'd be damned if she'd let it have one more. Squaring her shoulders, Angel left the battlements. She was ready to face the road ahead however frightening it was. She'd do it and somehow, one day, she'd see her family again. The Rage wouldn't win. Not this time.

As she headed inside, Angel wondered sadly whether there would ever be a time when she wasn't forced to leave Eriadne by Lucas. Shaking her head, Angel told herself there was no point in thinking about that either. She had to focus on the road that lay ahead, and no matter how many doubts and fears she had, she had to follow it, to whatever end.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes

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