

# The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes - Part 4: Regrets

by The Space Witches



Everyone is trying to keep up appearances, but Angel hasn't been forgotten.

## Chapter 3

May 2279

Earth

Gideon sat by the side of the pool, watching his wife and children splashing around, playing, while he sat in the shade, taking occasional swigs from a bottle of cold beer. He'd planned to join them in the pool, but those plans had changed when their visitor had arrived. Gideon had quickly thrown on a pair of shorts and a shirt, which now hung open leaving his chest bare to

the gentle breeze wafting across the patio.

The Gideon family had arrived in their villa on Malta the day before, to stay for a week during Marcus' half-term vacation from school. It was their first chance to be together as a family since the Easter holidays, and Gideon was having to work hard at hiding his annoyance at the interruption to their plans caused by their visitor's arrival. Fortunately, Deborah and Marcus were both too intent on their game to notice his mood.

Gideon watched and smiled as his wife pushed herself up out of the water and onto the side of the pool. She shook her head vigorously, her long blonde hair sending a shower of water droplets down onto the children below, causing squeals of protest. Deborah laughed, then swung her arms back, and dived back into the pool, surfacing under Mattie and boosting the delighted little girl up into the air.

Even that brief glimpse of Deborah's bikini clad body had been enough to stir Gideon's groin. Her long legs, beautiful curves and pale golden skin always had that effect on him. His thoughts drifted back to earlier that morning when he had helped her apply sun block all over her body, to protect her skin against the strong Maltese sun. It had done nothing to protect her against his lechery and lascivious leering of course.

Gideon shifted in his seat, leaning forward to hide his arousal, and lifting the jug of lemonade to cover his movement. "Would you like another?"

The visitor nodded, remaining silent as he watched the woman and children playing in the pool, a small, fond smile on his face. "Thank you, Cap...Matthew. That would be delightful."

Gideon smiled at the slip. It had taken a long time to get Trulann to call him by his given name. The Ranger sat in the shade next to Gideon, showing no sign of discomfort despite being attired in full Ranger uniform, complete with cloak, on the hot day. Gideon decided it must be a Minbari thing. They probably considered it dishonorable to perspire. Did Minbari sweat? Gideon found himself looking at the bald head of his visitor, trying to see if any beads of perspiration were forming there. [Nope. Just the usual blue streak.]

"So what can I do for you, Trulann? Unless this is a social visit?"

That was about as likely as Sheridan and Delenn just 'dropping by' for a chat. Minbari Rangers didn't seem to have social lives.

Trulann shook his head, took a sip of his lemonade, and proceeded to brief Gideon on his next assignment for the ISA. The bad news was that he'd be going to the Drazi home-world for a while. The good news was that the mission didn't start for another three months. It looked like the Gideons were going to get a long summer vacation this year.

The details of the Drazi mission wafted over Gideon as he continued to watch his family play. Trulann would leave a briefing data crystal; he could study it later. When the Ranger finally wound down, Gideon looked across at him and took another pull on his beer.

"Have you had a chance to find out anything about that other issue?"

Since Marcus Cole's disappearance two months earlier, Trulann had acted as Gideon's contact with the Rangers regarding his personal mission: the quest to find Angel and Lucas Buck.

Trulann looked across at Gideon and shook his head regretfully. "I am sorry. I have passed word to other Rangers to keep a watch for your sister-in-law during their travels, but without result so far."

Gideon slammed his beer bottle down onto the table and leaped to his feet, starting to pace back and forth across the patio as he growled, "How is this possible, Trulann? How can they stay hidden this long with the Rangers out looking for them? They have to be somewhere." The retired Captain knew he was over-reacting, but he had never been entirely rational where Angel was concerned. Her long absence from his life hadn't helped that issue. A part of him would always love her, and another part of him loathed and despised Lucas Buck with an intensity that was becoming almost overwhelming.

Trulann's voice was level and controlled as he replied quietly, "Human beings have created communities on hundreds of planets. We do not have records of all those communities. Humans move from planet to planet, sometimes cohabiting with other species, sometimes creating their own colonies. Trying to find two humans amongst the billions scattered throughout the galaxy is a slow and difficult task. But we will not stop looking. We are aware of the debt of gratitude you are owed by this planet and by the ISA, Captain. We will do our utmost to pay that debt."

Gideon forced his feelings back under control, all too aware that his wife and son had stopped splashing in the pool and were now looking at him gravely, no doubt picking up on his negative emotions. Turning his back on the pool, he pushed the guilt, anger and hatred he felt deep back inside himself. Gideon smiled at the Ranger and said quietly, "And I'm grateful for the help of the Rangers, Trulann. It's just that..."

Deborah's deep, soft voice interrupted him. "It's just that we're worried about what has happened to Angel. It's been nearly three years since we lost her, and I keep wondering why she hasn't been able to get a message to us in all this time. Why she couldn't at least let us know that she's safe and well, even if she couldn't tell us where she is."

Gideon hadn't heard her coming up behind him, but now he turned and put his arms around his wife, ignoring the wetness of her body as he held her tightly. Deborah rested her head on his shoulder for a moment, creating a damp patch on his shoulder, then she looked up and smiled at Trulann. "You have my thanks, as well as Matthew's, for everything you've done and are doing to find my sister. Are you able to join us for lunch? I'm just going in to prepare something."

Gideon knew Deborah was covering her own pain, her sense of loss and despair, and that just added to his guilt that he hadn't been able to find Angel. This was all his fault. He knew deep down that he should have been able to save Angel, to find her and rescue her. He despised himself for failing, and vowed for the millionth time that one day he would find Lucas Buck and kill him.

Trulann accepted the invitation, and both men watched as Deborah walked into the house, Gideon enjoying the gentle sway of her hips, and the sight of her neat butt barely covered by her swimsuit.

Gesturing at Trulann to sit again, Gideon lifted his beer and emptied the bottle, calming himself as he watched his children, who were once more playing in the pool.

Demon busied herself preparing lunch, pulling together a fresh salad, being careful to select only those items she knew Trulann would find acceptable. As she worked, she wiped away the tears that flowed down her face, biting her lip and making sure that she didn't project her emotions.

Her grief at the loss of her sister never abated; it never went away. All she could do was control it, hide it, pretend to her family that she could live a normal life while part of her heart was breaking inside her. Most of the time, she was successful. Most of the time, Matthew and Marcus thought she was getting on with her life without her sister. Most of the time she had them fooled.

But deep down, the pain never went away. Deep inside Demon, she felt as if there was a wound that would never heal without her sister, and she was beginning to lose hope of ever finding Angel again. Demon was beginning to believe that she would have to live with the pain of loss for the rest of her life.

Wiping away another tear, Demon sliced tomatoes and thought about her other worries. Matthew's obsession with Lucas was growing stronger. His hatred for his ancestor seemed to increase with every day that passed, and it was starting to worry Demon badly. It was an unhealthy obsession, a deep seated hatred that could warp Matthew's personality, changing his behavior toward his family and friends.

Demon knew that Matthew had a dark side to him. He could be drawn down into depression and despair, his negative emotions almost overwhelming him. That was how he had been when she had first met him, when the pressures and stress of being responsible for saving every life on Earth had weighed heavily on his shoulders. The darkness had lifted from Matthew during the years they had been together, particularly after the cure for the Drakh plague had been found, but now it was gathering again. Demon didn't know how to fight it, didn't know if she had the strength to bring Matthew back to happiness, when so much of her energy was spent fighting her own despair. She just knew that somehow she had to find the strength to keep herself going and to support her husband.

Moving into the bedroom, Demon quickly changed out of her damp bikini and pulled on a simple black sundress that was more suitable for entertaining a Ranger. Pausing briefly in front of the mirror in the bathroom, the tall blonde tied back her damp, wayward curls with a black scarf, and splashed her face with cold water, washing away the signs of her tears. She lifted her hand to touch the fine lines at the corners of her eyes; the visible evidence of the years that had passed since she first met Matthew.

Taking a deep breath, Demon straightened her back and pulled herself together. It was time to put on a happy face and convince her family that everything was just fine. Marcus may be an empath, and Matthew may love her, but neither of them could detect her true feelings if she really tried to keep them hidden.

Demon walked through the villa to the patio, forcing a smile to her face as she called her family and their guest in to lunch.

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It was gone 23:00 ship's time when John Matheson silently emerged from his children's room, where he had just kissed his sleeping son and daughters good night. Even though the twins had recently had their tenth birthdays, and Naima had turned eight a few months before, they had so far unanimously refused all offers of being moved to separate rooms.

John smiled and wondered how long it would be until they changed their minds. They may fight among themselves sometimes, but the children were always ready to defend each other against 'outside' forces. However, even that unified front had just been breached.

In the course of their last mission, the Excalibur had visited a newly settled planet to deliver ISA personnel and supplies. Even though the climate in the area they had visited was unstable, Lily had leaped at the chance to leave the Excalibur with Faylinn, Dasha and Naima. John knew that it wasn't only for the children's sake.

"To get some color on their cheeks, strengthen their immune system, and to show them what life is like outside of a star-ship," as Lily had put it. The outdoors were what the tiny redhead missed most about her life on the Excalibur, so she took what few chances she had to leave the ship.

This time, it might not have been such a good idea, since several of the settlers they had come into contact with had had colds, which Faylinn had picked it up and spread on to her siblings. Not even Luke had been able to provide more help than the same remedies that had been used for centuries.

[Amazing that modern medicine has found cures to illnesses that meant certain death only a hundred years ago. We even found a cure for the Drakh plague, but we still haven't found a cure for the common cold. I guess that's a good indication that we shouldn't consider ourselves omnipotent.]

John sat down wearily on the sofa, next to Luke who had settled down there with a book: Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island". His partner looked up at John, smiling gently. "Busy day?"

John consciously relaxed the muscles in his body as he let his head rest against the back of his sofa, eyes closing. "Paperwork and bureaucrats."

"Ew. Please, I only just had dinner..."

John opened his eyes again and smiled weakly at Luke. His partner frowned, but before he could speak he was interrupted by Lily's voice coming from the direction of the kitchen. "Your dinner is almost ready, Sweet-Face."

He turned his head and smiled as the tiny red-head crossed the room, holding out his hand to her. When she took it, he pulled her down to sit between Luke and him. For a moment, John studied the slim, nimble fingers he held in his hand, then he said softly, "Alden called earlier."

He could feel Lily go rigid, but before she could bombard him with questions, he raised his eyes to hers and continued, "Still nothing new. I'm sorry."

He could see Lily's disappointment and pain in her eyes as she swallowed.

"Nothing at all?" Luke asked softly, sighing as John shook his head, then went on to tell his partners about Alden Catches' latest fruitless efforts to find clues as to the whereabouts of Angel and Lucas.

In the nine years since the Joneses' invasion of the Excalibur, the old telepath had become a good friend, and he was also Naima's Goddess-Father. Alden had immediately agreed to help them when he had heard what had happened to Angel. As a Mr. Jones, as well as teacher of future Joneses, Alden had extensive resources available to him within the Bureau of Telepath Integration. And since he had been a 'blip'--an unregistered telepath--before the telepath war, he also had friends among the former telepath rebels. They all were looking for Angel and Lucas, doing surface scans on people who might possibly have met them. Yet even this extensive network of telepaths had been unable to find a trace of Lily's missing sister so far.

Luke sighed. "And it seems that the Rangers haven't had any more luck, from Matt's last call."

John nodded, frowning. "I'm worried about Matt. He seems... almost obsessed with finding Lucas and Angel, lately."

Lily sighed, visibly pulling herself together. "I know Demon is worried about him, too. Matt tries not to show his feelings, but..."

"It's becoming more and more obvious. Damn, he always had a tendency to obsess about things..." John wished he was closer to his old friend and mentor. Maybe he would be able to do something...

"I just hope he's not too obsessed to realize that Demon is suffering, too."

Lily's voice was a mere whisper, but it brought John back to the here and now. He saw a single tear roll down her cheek, and the worry and pain she felt were obvious in her emerald green eyes. He and Luke pulled her into their arms, and John joined their minds. *[[We will find her, somehow. Don't give up hope.]]*

John wasn't sure how, but he knew that they must find Angel, for her sake and for the sake of their whole family.

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June 2279

"Have you got everything ready?" asked Angel, weakly.

She watched Harry shifting, avoiding eye contact with her. She closed her eyes, willing back the waves of weakness that threatened to drag her down. "Harry?" she questioned. This time her voice was a little stronger.

Harry sighed, his brow creased as he argued softly, "Miss Angel, I don't think it's a good idea you trying to leave, not so soon after having the baby."

Angel shifted on the bed, trying to sit upright but she gasped as pain cut through her stomach like a hot knife. Harry rushed forward. "Please, lay still, you know what the doc said." Harry tried to arrange her pillows more comfortably behind her head.

"I know what the doctor said, Harry" scowled Angel. Her friend's face went red and she regretted her tone of voice. Taking his hand, Angel smiled at him tenderly. "Harry, I know you're worried about me, but I have to do this and it can't wait."

"But you don't look so good, Miss Angel. You know the doc said you had to stay in bed for at least a week. If you try to move about too much before that you could bleed inside and the doc said that would be real bad! You nearly died. I don't want nothing happening to you now!" Harry eyes filled with tears and Angel watched his lip trembling.

Everything he said was true, but she couldn't let his fears influence her. Angel knew she was taking a risk leaving so soon after giving birth to her son, but she couldn't stay a moment longer than she had to. If she moved carefully and slowly, she was sure she would be OK.

[You don't sound so sure about that.]

Angel ignored her inner voice and focused on Harry. "I'll be OK, Harry. I have to be. I can't stay, not for a second longer. I have to get my son away from Lucas. You, more than anyone, should understand that," she said, searching Harry's face.

For a long time he didn't look at her, then he raised his eyes to her face and nodded.

Angel smiled gratefully. "Good. Now is everything ready?"

Again Harry nodded and told Angel he had passage booked for her and her baby on a transport heading off Regula the following morning. "And don't worry Miss, the Boss ain't got a clue, I've been careful and done the bookings and everything under a different name, like you said I should. I've got papers for you and for the baby. I've got clothes for you both. I bought new ones like you asked so the Boss won't find nothing missing before you leave."

"Thank you, Harry. I couldn't do this without you," said Angel, as she squeezed Harry's hand.

The big man blushed and lowered his gaze in the face of Angel's praise.

"Well now, ain't this cozy," drawled a voice from the doorway.

Angel and Harry both looked at Lucas as he leaned against the door frame, arms folded, watching them. Angel bristled and she watched as Harry turned red and quickly withdrew his hand.

"I'm going now," he said nervously and began backing away from the bed.

Angel managed to grab his hand, and she looked up at him, ignoring Lucas for the moment as she said softly, "I'll see you later." She looked deeply into Harry's eyes and prayed he understood her silent message to continue with the plans to leave. She saw understanding in his deep set eyes as he smiled and nodded then pulled his hand free and headed toward the door.

Lucas didn't move and Harry stopped short. Angel could see him fidget nervously and damned Lucas as he eyed Harry with an aloof expression. Then he straightened and stepped into the room, allowing Harry to leave.

Annoyed, Angel wanted to yell at Lucas for behaving like that toward Harry, but she held her tongue. If she let even a fraction of her anger toward Lucas out it would be like a chain reaction and she wouldn't be able to stop.

She watched as he approached the side of the bed. Lucas stopped and smiled then bent forward to kiss her. It took every ounce of self control for Angel not to bite down as he gently slid his tongue into her mouth. The kiss was tender and brief.

Lucas straightened then sat on the edge of the bed, taking her hand in his as he searched her face. "You're very pale, love. I hope the doctor is taking good care of you?"

"He is," answered Angel, unable to stop herself pulling her hand away, pretending to scratch an itch on the bridge of her nose.

She noticed a flicker in Lucas' eyes and her stomach knotted as he asked, "Is something wrong, Angel-face?"

Clearing her throat, Angel shook her head, "No. I'm just tired." She hoped her voice didn't betray anything.

"You've been through a difficult time. It's understandable, and it's why the doc says you're to rest for the next week or so," said Lucas, raising a hand to caress her cheek. "We nearly lost you, Angel-face," he added in a soft drawl.

Was it her imagination or did Lucas sound as if he had been genuinely worried about her? Angel couldn't believe it. "I'm stronger than I look," she responded quietly. Suddenly all her energy drained away and her stomach began to ache again, but she knew if she mentioned it, she'd be given a painkiller that would knock her out. That wasn't what she needed. There was just one thing she was desperate for--to see her son.

Angel had seen him briefly when she'd given birth, but she'd been too weak and drugged to hold him. She'd lost consciousness after getting to looking at him for only a few minutes. The thing she really wanted now was to see her son and hold him for the first time. Angel closed her eyes and willed her nausea away, determined to be well enough to see her baby.

"Angel-face?"

Lucas' voice forced Angel to open her eyes and she saw him looking at her with concern as he rose from the bed.

"I'm fine," said Angel, hearing the weakness in her voice.

"You sure as hell don't like fine, darlin'," drawled Lucas. "You're hurtin'."

"I'm fine," insisted Angel again. "I want to see my baby, Lucas. I want to hold him. I haven't held him yet. I need..."

Lucas cut her off, "Darlin, you ain't in no condition to be holding my son. When you're stronger, I'll get the nurse to bring him to you."

Angel wanted to argue, but she felt as if she was trying to wade through water, her eyes and

body felt heavy and stabbing pain was now cutting through her belly. She tried to ignore it, telling herself she couldn't afford to be this weak and in this much pain. She was going to leave the next day and she had to be strong enough physically to do it.

"I'm strong enough now, Lucas. I want to see my son, damn you."

"All in good time, darlin'," said Lucas, watching her closely for a second before he turned for the door.

He either ignored Angel or didn't hear her as she protested again. "Now! I want to see him now."

Lucas disappeared into the room beyond. She heard muffled voices and then a few minutes later Lucas returned with the doctor beside him.

"I hear you're not feeling well?" asked Doctor Alentari, the man Lucas had employed to care for Angel in the last weeks of her pregnancy and to help with the delivery.

"I'm fine," insisted Angel.

The doctor smiled at her indulgently and looked at the monitors above her bed. He clucked his tongue and shook his head. "You've had too much strain for one day, my dear," said the doctor, as he pulled a hypo out of his coat pocket.

Angel shook her head "No, I'm fine. Please, I want to see my son." She was angry and frustrated and she knew it was starting to show.

"You can see him later, my dear." Alentari reached for her arm. Angel tried to pull away but she didn't have enough strength and he gave her the shot. "It will help with the pain and make you sleep. When you wake up we can think about bringing in the baby to see you."

His tone was sweet and nice, as if he were talking to a child, and Angel wished she had the strength to smack him in the mouth. But she didn't. The drug was starting to take effect and she could feel the warmth of oblivion creeping nearer. The doctor patted her arm and told her to rest and then he turned, giving Lucas a look and a nod before leaving the room.

Angel fought against the sedative power of the painkiller and looked at Lucas. "Damn you, why won't you let me see my son?" Lucas just looked at her. Was he chewing his lip? Angel couldn't be sure because everything was starting to get fuzzy before her eyes. Suddenly she felt panic. Was Lucas deliberately keeping her baby from her? Did he know what she was planning? Paranoid thoughts buzzed around in her head.

"I ain't keeping the baby from you, love. You just need to get a bit stronger. Then you can see him. He's beautiful, Angel. He has your eyes," said Lucas gently as he sat down again and took her hand.

Angel couldn't respond. The sedative had kicked in and she couldn't get her brain to function. Lucas' face began to swim completely out of focus and darkness began to flow over her. Her only thought before oblivion claimed her again was of her son and how no matter how weak she was she would rescue him from the clutches of his father.

Lucas watched as Angel's eyes closed and she started to drift into a drug induced sleep. He sensed some of the emotions coming from Angel, and he focused his third eye on her, just managing to catch a fleeting sense of anxiety about his son. For a moment, he thought he sensed something else, something that set off warning bells, but then it was gone. Lucas chewed his lip, wondering what it could have been. He couldn't read Angel's thoughts clearly when she was unconscious and he decided he'd delve into her mind later when she was awake.

He continued to watch her sleep, taking in her pale skin and the lines that marked her face, showing just how difficult a time she'd had giving birth. Lucas told himself he didn't feel guilty about how close Angel had come to death. There were always risks in childbirth. It wasn't his fault. Not his fault at all that he'd nearly lost his Angel.

Lucas sighed and reached out a hand to stroke his thumb down her face. She was still beautiful and it would have been a shame if she'd died. After all, he was grateful to her for providing him with such a strong and perfect heir, and besides that she still gave him more pleasure than any woman ever had or could.

"And you still will, darlin," whispered Lucas.

Nothing would change. Angel would still belong to him, being there to warm his bed and look after his son until... Lucas shook his head. He didn't want to think about the future. He knew in time he would end up killing Angel, as much as he lo... Lucas stopped his thoughts quickly. He didn't love Angel. That wasn't allowed. He did care for her, but that wouldn't matter, because he knew in the end she would fight against his plans for their son. Then the Rage would kill her. It would never allow her to get between it and the heir.

"But until that day comes, you will continue to be mine...body and soul," said Lucas, bending forward to kiss Angel gently on the lips. Then he rose and left the room, intent on visiting his son.

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Standing in the doorway of the nursery, Lucas watched as the wet-nurse fed his son. Arrangements had been made months before, when the village woman had given birth to her own son. Although he'd said nothing to Angel, who had been only three months pregnant at the time, Lucas had known it was unlikely she would be able to nurse her baby after the birth. Carrying a Buck baby was never easy on the mother.

Lucas thought back on the woman who had carried his first heir. Judith had suffered a difficult pregnancy, followed by one of the longest and most painful deliveries ever recorded at the county hospital. Everyone had been amazed when she'd found the strength to haul herself out of bed and throw herself out of the second story window so soon after the birth. Of course, she'd needed a little help...

The wet-nurse looked up at Lucas as he sauntered into the nursery, smiling as she said, "He's just about finished. Do you want to hold him for a while?"

Lucas gave her the sort of sappy smile he knew was expected from a proud father. The woman had been only too happy to help out with Lucas' baby, coming to live in Angel's house, leaving

her own child to be looked after by her family. Lucas was paying her well, and he had stood as god-father to her youngest son at the naming ceremony a couple of months before. He hadn't exactly been delighted when the couple had told him the name they'd chosen for the child--Matthew wasn't his favorite name. He'd had trouble from too many Matts in his time--but he'd smiled as he'd promised to take care of the boy if anything happened to his parents. Oh yes, he'd take care of him...

Taking the baby from the wet-nurse, Lucas told her he'd stay. "You go rest a while. I'll turn on the monitor when I leave." Lucas nodded at the baby-monitor that stood on the table next to the crib.

The woman smiled and left the room, leaving Lucas to spend a little time alone with his son.

Lucas looked down to see a pair of dark blue eyes gazing up at him. He knew all babies had blue eyes, but something told him that this baby's eyes would stay that way, paling just a little to match the clear crystal blue of his mother's eyes. The fuzz of dark hair covering the baby's skull indicated that he might also have inherited his mother's hair color. If he had, those were the only two physical things he had got from his mother. In every other way, this boy was pure Buck.

Closing his eyes, Lucas shifted his hold on the baby, freeing one hand to rest on his son's head. The range of feelings he could sense was amazing. For a child just a couple of days old, the boy had incredible strength of mind.

The strongest feeling was of contentment. The boy had suckled until he was full, and now he was ready to sleep, feeling comfortable, warm and drowsy. But underlying that satisfaction were a whole range of other feelings. Fear, frustration, anger and greed all warred within the tiny head. The baby sensed his own helplessness and resented it bitterly. He wanted--needed--power, and he knew he wasn't yet strong enough to get it.

Lucas knew that raising this child would be hell. The boy would be difficult and demanding, constantly raging at the limitations imposed on him by his father. The boy would need a firm hand, and Lucas was just the man to apply it. That anger and frustration had to be dammed; must be contained until it grew strong enough to demand release. And then the boy would kill his father and take his true inheritance.

The Rage.

Lucas moved his hand to touch the baby's fingers. At once, the tiny hand reached out and grabbed his thumb, gripping it firmly. The boy's bright blue eyes never wavered from Lucas' face as he glared up at his father.

Lucas smiled. "That's my boy." He gently released his thumb from the grip of the hand he knew would one day kill him, and laid the baby in his crib. Then he stood watching the baby fall asleep, thinking about the future.

It wouldn't be easy. Angel would try to love the boy, and that couldn't be allowed. No Buck could experience love as a child. It weakened them, and left them unprepared for their inheritance. Lucas had made that mistake before.

After Judith had died in her...accident, Lucas had deliberately left Caleb to be brought up by

the oaf everyone thought was his father, Gage Temple. Lucas had wanted Caleb brought up in poverty, starved of affection and hungry for something better. He had wanted Caleb to be angry, to be bitter about his start in life. Then he would have been eager to take the power that came with the Rage when the time was right.

Unfortunately, it hadn't occurred to Lucas that Caleb might develop some affection for his mentally damaged older half-sister, Merlyn. The night Lucas had raped the girl's mother he had also messed with the daughter's mind, leaving her in an almost vegetative state, as she muttered over and over again, "Someone's at the door, someone's at the door," the last words she'd spoken as a normal child. The love that had grown between the two siblings had wrecked Caleb for Lucas' purposes. Even when Lucas had finally killed Merlyn with his own hands, that love was strong enough to bring her spirit back, to guard Caleb and frustrate Lucas.

That wasn't going to happen again. This child would not be corrupted by love. This child had the potential to be the greatest host the Rage had ever known. Lucas could not allow Angel to ruin him. But how would he stop her? How could he stop Angel loving her son?

Lucas smiled to himself and reached out to touch his now sleeping child. Laying his fingers lightly on the baby's head, Lucas closed his eyes and opened his mind. Reaching out with his power, he touched the boy's mind, making tiny adjustments. When he had finished, the emotions running through the sleeping baby's head were subtly different. Now the contentment and warmth were buried deep, and the anger, greed and frustration overlaid all other feelings.

Within moments of the baby's birth, Lucas had detected Angel's mental bond with her son, even when Angel had been too weak to activate it. Since then, Lucas had been blocking the link, just as he'd always been able to block Angel's connection to her sisters, but now he lifted the block. If Angel linked to the boy now, she wouldn't like what she found when she touched the child's mind.

Leaning over to turn on the baby monitor, Lucas whistled softly to himself as he left the nursery.

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Angel moved carefully as she dressed in the bathroom. She was feeling stronger than she had in days. She was still in pain, but she refused to give into it. She slipped into a loose red jumper, grateful to Harry for having brought something big, baggy and comfortable. He'd arrived twenty minutes before with some clothes for her to change into. He'd handed them over with reluctance, again voicing his doubts about her condition, but she'd cut him off, telling him she was leaving, no matter what. So Harry had handed her the clothes and she'd disappeared into the bathroom to change.

Angel sighed. She had her own doubts about her condition. While she was feeling a little better, she knew she really wasn't that much stronger than she'd been the day before. The pain still came in waves, but she knew she had enough determination to carry herself forward, and that was all that she needed.

She'd been plagued by terrible nightmares, born from Lucas and the doctor not allowing her to see her son. Lost in a fog, she'd searched for her baby, catching glimpses of Lucas holding her son, but then he was gone, his cruel laughter drifting out to her through the fog. When Angel

had awoken that morning, she knew she had to get away, no matter what condition she was in physically.

Angel finished dressing and left the bathroom, moving slowly over to the dresser where her jewelry box lay. Moving aside the beautiful pieces Lucas had given her, Angel felt for the mechanism that released the false bottom, allowing her access to the one thing in the box that hadn't come from Lucas. The one thing she wasn't going to leave behind.

A lump in her throat threatened to choke Angel as she fingered the small piece of twisted metal that was all that remained of her wedding ring. The ring Michael had given her and which Lucas has tried to destroy. This was the only precious metal she refused to leave behind. Pushing the tiny lump of gold into her pocket, Angel turned and smiled sadly at Harry, who had risen as she came back into the room.

"Sorry, Miss Angel. They look a bit big on you," said Harry apologetically as he pointed at her clothes.

"They're perfect, Harry. Nice and comfy," she said, patting his arm as she carefully sat on the bed, taking several deep breaths to push back the ache in her belly. "So, run everything by me again."

"Boarding is at 11:30. The shuttle will depart at 12:00 and take us to the Crescent Moon up in orbit. I've booked a private room, a nice big one, Miss Angel. You just need to get the baby and meet me at the landing port. Then we can leave, and you and the baby will be safe from the Boss," explained Harry.

Angel was about to thank him when something he had said clicked in her mind. "Harry, did you just say 'we'? As in me, the baby and you?"

Harry broke into a smile and nodded, "Yes, I'm going with you."

She was about to argue when Harry went on, "There ain't nothing for me to stay for, if you ain't here."

Angel thought about what he'd just said and realized she couldn't make Harry stay. He was right; there was nothing for him on Regula IV and besides that, there would always be a risk that Lucas would figure out who had helped her run away. If Lucas found out it was Harry, he'd kill the big lug without a second thought. And Harry was the obvious culprit, having become Angel's closest friend.

Harry broke into her thoughts as he said almost desperately, "Besides, Miss Angel, you need looking after and help with the baby. I can do that. I can look after you."

Warm tears burned Angel's eyes at Harry's words, and she reached out to take his hand. "You are truly a good friend, Harry."

The big man blushed then smiled happily. "I've got Baby all ready to go as well, and I've got my bag all packed."

Angel laughed. She'd underestimated him. And she was grateful. He'd even thought about her dog, Baby, when she, to her shame, had forgotten. "You've thought of everything, Harry."

Thank you, I wouldn't be able to do this without your help," she said, rising from the bed to give him a kiss on the cheek.

Harry blushed even harder "It's nothing, Miss Angel. You know I'd do anything for you."

"I know you would, Harry," smiled Angel, as she moved around him. She stopped and took a deep breath as she looked at the door. Harry moved to stand beside her and she looked up at him. "Well, we'd better get this show on the road."

"You scared, Miss Angel?" asked Harry.

Angel nodded, "Terrified. I don't want Lucas to catch me doing this."

Harry nodded seriously and put his arm around Angel. "Don't worry, Miss Angel. The Boss is busy in town. He won't be back for hours."

Before Harry had arrived that morning, Lucas had come to visit. Angel had given him one of the best performances of her life, pretending everything was fine and that she felt better than she had in days. Thankfully, Lucas had stayed only a few minutes, excusing himself because he had business to attend to. He'd kissed her, telling her he'd be back in the early evening to visit with her for longer.

"Right. Well, we'd better go, Harry. We don't want to be late for our shuttle." said Angel, trying to sound brave.

"Shall I go with you to get the baby?" offered Harry.

Angel shook her head "No. You need to get everything down to the shuttle and I need to do this alone. Just in case something goes wrong, I don't want you caught along with me."

Harry looked set to argue again, but Angel waved him off. "No arguments, Harry. Come on now, we're running out of time," said Angel looked at the wall clock to her right. It was just before 10:30 local time.

"OK, Miss Angel. You be careful now and take it easy," said Harry, his expression stern.

Smiling, Angel nodded "You be careful too, Harry."

With that they left the room. Harry had checked earlier that the doctor was out, so no one saw them leave as they went their separate ways. Angel headed down the hallway to the nursery, while Harry left the house to get Baby and the bags down to the landing port. It was hard going for Angel. After only a few steps she was already tiring. As a healer, she knew she shouldn't be out of bed, but as a mother desperate to save her child, she knew she didn't have a choice. She just prayed that she would be strong enough to make it all the way to the landing port while carrying her baby.

[You will, because you must.]

Angel smiled. Usually her inner voice argued with her. It was a rare occasion indeed when it agreed with her. Angel decided to take that as a good omen that everything would be all right.

Angel peeked inside the nursery and sighed in relief. The wet nurse Lucas had hired to care for the baby wasn't there. Angel's eyes fell on the crib under the window, her heart in her throat. She glanced down the hallway, quickly making sure no one was coming then she walked into the room.

As she reached the crib, she noticed a baby monitor on the small table beside it, the red light flashing, indicating it was on. Obviously the wet nurse had left the room, but she must have the other monitor. Angel picked it up and switched it off. The last thing she needed was to alert the wet nurse to her presence. That might bring the woman up to the nursery. Angel placed the monitor back on the table then turned her attention to the crib.

Her breath caught in her throat as she saw her son lying there, fast asleep. He was so tiny and so perfect. A feeling Angel had never before experienced washed over her. Love--the most powerful love she'd ever known. Not like the love she felt for Lucas, or the love she had given Michael. Not even like the love she felt for her sisters. This was something stronger, more powerful, a deep and profound bond with the tiny scrap of humanity that lay asleep in the crib. Her son. At last she understood something of how her sisters felt for their children, and she wondered if, like them, she would have some form of mental link with her child.

She stood there for a while and just watched him sleeping, her arms aching to pick him up, but not wanting to touch him just yet. He looked so angelic as he lay asleep making soft little noises.

[That's my son,] thought Angel, awed. Since regaining consciousness after birth she'd not had the chance to feel anything toward her son, but now she did and it was so overwhelming she could feel herself shaking. He looked so innocent, so defenseless lying there.

Angel hadn't been able to make mental contact with him from the room where she'd laid recovering for the last few days, but she had told herself that maybe she needed to hold her son, to touch him, before their link was created. Angel could no longer resist the urge to pick up her child. She reached into the crib and carefully gathered him to her. Her heart raced in her chest and for the first time in days she didn't feel pain or tiredness. She cradled him carefully against her chest and smiled down at him. "You're beautiful," she whispered.

Whether disturbed by having been picked up or by the sound of her voice, the baby stirred in her arms. Angel smiled, then to her surprise, the baby's eyelids opened slowly and a pair of startling blue eyes looked up at her.

Angel gasped as suddenly a wave of hate, anger and evil rushed through her. She wobbled, feeling faint, and as quickly as she could she sat down on the rocking chair beside the crib, still carefully holding onto the baby. She closed her eyes and inhaled then exhaled several times, trying to calm herself and quiet the waves of dizziness and panic she felt.

Finally, she opened her eyes and looked down at her son. Once again his eyes were closed and he was sleeping. Angel watched him carefully, trying to understand what she'd just felt when he'd looked up her. [Those feelings couldn't have come from him!] thought Angel desperately.

There had been times during her pregnancy when Angel had felt the same thing. She had sometimes wondered if they came from the baby, but each time she'd convinced herself that it wasn't possible. She'd told herself that her baby wasn't evil, that what she felt only stemmed

from her feelings toward Lucas.

Angel gazed down at her son. There had to be a way she could know for sure. Taking a deep breath, Angel lifted her hand to her son's face and carefully placed her palm on his forehead. It was warm and soft to her touch. She closed her eyes and focused. At first there was nothing and then she again began to sense it--the evil.

Her eyes snapped open. [Dear God, no!] It was there inside her son and she couldn't deny it.

Warm tears stung her eyes. She didn't want to believe it, but deep down she knew it was the truth. Her son was evil and he'd been born that way. Angel's hatred for Lucas grew. It was his fault; his and the Rage's. A sob tore from her throat and she looked down. She loved her child, but now she knew her fight to save him might fail. While she could rescue him from the direct influence of his supernaturally evil father, could she save him from the evil inside him?

Angel had her doubts, but as she looked at her baby, she felt the love she had for him and she knew she had to try. Evil could be beaten, and if she cared for and loved her child enough, if she showed him that there was another way, it might make a difference.

"I have to do whatever I can, don't I?" asked Angel of the sleeping bundle in her arms.

He stirred again in his sleep and Angel smiled. "I haven't even named you, have I little one?" asked Angel. She had spent so much time during her pregnancy thinking up plans to escape Lucas that she'd pushed aside picking out a name for the baby, not even sure she'd get the chance to name him.

Memories of the naming ceremony Lily had held for Naima rushed into Angel's mind, bringing tears to her eyes. There would be no gathering of loved ones for her child, no tying of knots on a quilt, no kind wishes and promises of future love. Naming her son would be one more thing she would have to do alone.

Angel listened to her son make soft snuffling noises in his sleep and again she was overwhelmed by how much she loved him, despite what she felt inside him. "What am I going to call you?"

There had been one name that she and Lucas had discussed early on in her pregnancy. Lucas had wanted their son's name to remind him of his mother and for the name to be a strong one. They'd picked out Gabriel. The name of an angel. Looking down at the beautiful child, it seemed to fit.

"How do you like the sound of Gabriel?" It could have been her imagination but Angel could have sworn that he smiled in his sleep. She decided to take that as a sign of approval. "Right, Gabriel it is."

Angel sighed. She wanted to stay there, just holding Gabriel, but she noticed the clock beside the baby monitor on the table. It was 10:52 and she had to make her way to the landing port. "Come, my darling. Let's get you out of here," whispered Angel.

Just as Angel was about to rise, a voice stopped her from the doorway. "Just what the hell do you think you're doing?"

Angel froze and looked up to find Lucas standing there. He was not happy. Her stomach

knotted and her legs went to jelly, forcing her to sit back down in the chair, staring up at the man she hated, loved and feared.

"What do you think you're playin' at, darlin? Leaving your bed like that!" said Lucas as he strode into the room toward her.

Fear at being caught robbed Angel of her voice and she stared up at Lucas as he stopped in front of her. She tried to tell herself to calm down, that he'd only asked her why she'd left her bed, but panic was setting in as she saw her chance to escape disappearing. She looked down at Gabriel and could feel tears beginning to form in her eyes. She looked back up at Lucas, struggling for an explanation.

The look she saw in his eyes froze her blood. His expression had turned deadly and his eyes darkened with more anger than she'd ever seen directed at her before. Mind numbing fear gripped Angel and she gathered Gabriel protectively to her.

[Chapter 1](#) [Chapter 2](#) {Chapter 3}

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## The Witches of Eriadne: Something Wicked this Way Comes

[Part 1: The Gathering](#) [Part 2: Persuasion](#) [Part 3: Divisions](#) [Part 4: Regrets](#) {Part 5: Finale}