

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn - Part 1: Past

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Those who stayed behind... missing their loved ones.

Chapter 1

April 2269

Gideon sat on the bridge, trying to wait patiently. It wasn't working. For the tenth time in the last hour, he suppressed the desire to call Engineering and ask them if they could get more speed out of the engines. They were going as fast as the Excalibur could, and that was damned fast, but he knew that when they arrived at the next beacon, they would drop out of hyperspace and they'd be in range of Eriadne. For the first time in nearly four months, he and Deborah would be close enough to talk over the hyperlink.

While they had exchanged messages almost daily, Gideon desperately wanted to talk to her. He'd become increasingly concerned at what he'd seen in her messages. He could see that she'd lost weight and she looked more and more tired. She made a huge effort to be bright and cheerful in every message, talking about Lily and Luke and Ilas and Dureena. She told him about things that had happened in the village, answering questions he'd asked in previous messages, and commenting on things he'd talked about. If the messages had been voice only, she might just have gotten away with it, but Gideon could see the shadows that had formed under her eyes, the increasing prominence of her cheek and collarbones, and the look of weariness in her eyes.

He hadn't said a word about what he'd seen. What good would it do to let her know that she looked

sick? There was nothing he could do about it. The baby was due in another five weeks, and he was still desperately seeking an excuse to get back to Eriadne in time for the birth. Unfortunately, things had gotten much tougher back on Earth since his last visit to Deborah, and the irony was that it was a direct result of the Excalibur's success at finding a cure--but not the right cure.

Gideon drummed his fingers impatiently on the edge of his chair and waited.

Demon was sitting on the sofa in her room, reading. Since the start of her pregnancy she'd read every book on obstetrics in the extensive library, and Luke had joked that she knew more about the subject than he did. He was probably right. Demon would never let anyone know, but this pregnancy terrified her. She'd never wanted children, never intended to get pregnant; she was sure that she had absolutely no maternal instincts and was going to be a terrible mother. She sometimes wondered if she would have continued with the pregnancy had the child been anyone other than Matthew's. But it was Matthew's, and there was no way in this universe that she could have aborted his child. Demon loved him too much and was amazed to discover that she really wanted his child.

Matthew's absence and the pregnancy had taken their toll, along with the loss of her sister. Demon felt worn down by it all and was desperately lonely. Her sisters, Lily and Ilas, and their friends had done everything they could to help her. Luke had been particularly kind, listening to her when her grief and pain had burst out several weeks before, but talking about how she felt hadn't changed anything. Demon was frightened, lonely without Matthew, and grief-stricken about the loss of Angel.

She could only think of one thing to do to improve her situation. The more she knew about pregnancy and childbirth, the less frightening it would become. Familiarity might just breed acceptance. So Demon read and studied and replayed every one of Matthew's messages every day, hoping that this would make him feel closer. He hadn't spoken about when he could get back to her for weeks now, and she knew this meant that he was losing hope of finding a way back in time for the birth. If the thought of giving birth and being a mother frightened her, the thought of doing so alone was truly terrifying.

The only good thing was that she was no longer projecting her feelings. If she had been, the whole planet would have felt her fear by now. But so far she'd been able to keep it to herself. Demon wondered how much longer she could keep up the façade.

The comm. console in the corner of her room emitted a low tone. She was puzzled for a moment, wondering who could be calling her. The comm. system was rarely used. If anyone wanted to talk to her, they usually just came by to see her. Demon pushed herself up from the sofa, irritated yet again by her clumsiness. Her belly had expanded significantly and she always felt slightly off balance. Walking to the console, she could see an unfamiliar light blinking. As she sat down in front of the screen, her stomach did a complete somersault as she realized that the call was coming through the hyperspace link. [Matthew!]

Demon hit the receive button and waited for some static to clear. And there he was! She put her hand to the screen and touched it where she could see his face.

Gideon smiled back at her and spoke. "Hello."

His voice was rough and Demon could tell that he found this contact as emotional as she did. She felt tears welling up in her eyes and forced them back ruthlessly. [He hasn't called to see you snivel,] she told herself sternly. Demon smiled as widely as she could and replied in a whisper, "Matthew. Where

are you?" She tried desperately to suppress the hope that he was nearby and on his way. Gideon's next words tore her heart out.

"We're only just in range and won't stay that way for long, but I wanted to see you, if only for a moment. How are you? How's the baby?"

Demon worked hard to push down the disappointment that threatened to overwhelm her and smiled back at him cheerfully. "We're both fine. I've lost a bit of weight, but it's nothing to worry about, honestly." Demon knew that Gideon could see the bones in her face and shoulders more prominently than before, and rushed to explain, "I haven't had much appetite lately." She smiled warmly at his face on the screen. "Once I've had the baby, I should be a whole lot easier for you to pick up, if you want to." She grinned. "Mind you, I wasn't that hard a 'pickup' in the first place, was I? How long did I resist your seduction? Must have been all of ten seconds."

Gideon laughed. "Actually, I don't think you held out that long. Quite a technique I must have."

Demon forced herself to ask, "Shall I get Ilas and Lily? I know they'd love to see Max and John." She watched as Gideon shook his head.

"No, there's no time. We've only dropped out of hyperspace long enough to pick up a passenger." She watched as he looked off to one side of the screen. "And the shuttle is just pulling into the landing bay, so we'll be on our way again in a couple of minutes." Gideon turned back to face her. "I'm being selfish. I wanted all of this time with only you." Demon could see the longing in his eyes and knew that it was matched by her own. "Messages are great, but I wanted to really see you."

This time Demon couldn't fight back her tears. She put her hand back to the screen. "I miss you."

She watched as Gideon's attention was diverted again. He looked back, his pain evident. "I have to go. We're ready to jump. I'll get there as soon as I can." The screen started to break up.

Demon stood and shouted, hoping that he could hear her last words. "I love you, Matthew. Please come back soon." The screen went blank. She dropped her head to her arms and cried.

Gideon leaned back on the table in the conference room and swallowed hard. He'd heard her last words and wondered when 'soon' might be. Probably not soon enough. He was more worried than ever. She looked thin and tired, not the strong, vigorous woman he'd met eight months earlier, and that was his fault, too. If he hadn't gotten her pregnant, she wouldn't be in that state. He sometimes wondered whether anything could happen in this universe that he didn't feel guilty about.

Lily took the last steps to the top of the hill and put down the bag containing her drum, which she'd worn like a backpack, with both straps over her shoulders. For a minute she just stood there, catching her breath. A few months ago that wouldn't have been the case, but now her diaphragm couldn't expand as effectively anymore, since her babies took up more room in her womb. She also found it more and more difficult to find a comfortable sleeping position. At this point, she was really glad to have her lounging pit, filled with many comfortable cushions that she could arrange around and below her body, still leaving enough space for Raven to lay beside her. With all the cushions she needed now, they wouldn't have fit in her bed anymore without him being in serious danger of falling out if either

of them moved! But despite these inconveniences--having to use the bathroom ever more frequently, her backaches, and growing fatigue--she felt fine, especially since finding out that her babies seemed to be forming a mental bond with her. It wasn't strong yet, but it seemed to be growing with every passing day. Demon and Ilas had confirmed they felt that, too, with their children.

Lovingly rubbing her bulging belly, Lily thought, [Physically, I'm fine. Emotionally, I'm fine too, with one small exception.] She sighed as she let her gaze wander around as she turned in a full circle, then sat down and opened the bag.

"There you go." Dr. Luke Raven ruffled the hair of the little Brakiri girl whose forearm had been grazed in a fall, which he'd just disinfected and bound. He winked at her as she fled into her mother's arms and smiled shyly at him.

"Thank you," her mother said with a warm smile. Her name was Kirrin, and she was one of the women who taught the Brakiri children along with Lily, and had gradually taken over some of her duties as the tiny redhead's pregnancy developed. She'd also helped Luke get to know Brakiri physiology better when he'd taken over Angel's duties as the village doctor, and helped him when necessary. She'd been doing just that when her youngest daughter, five-year-old Thikira, had run to her crying, holding her bleeding arm.

Suddenly Luke was distracted by a rhythmic sound that carried on the wind. At first he couldn't identify it, but it sounded familiar somehow.

Kirrin, who had also looked up upon hearing the sound, said, "Mistress Lily's drum."

Luke looked at her, puzzled. "You're right." He turned his head, concentrating on the source of the sound. "But it's not coming from the castle."

Kirrin shook her head, listening just as intently. "No. The hill." She looked back at Luke, her eyes unreadable.

Lily was sitting cross-legged, her drum over her left leg, beating her hands onto its taut skin in an instinctive rhythm, eyes closed. At the start it had been a slow, calm rhythm, but then it had grown faster, more agitated. She didn't notice time pass or her palms beginning to feel warm, then hot, or her legs beginning to feel strange because she had sat in the same position for so long. Lily's red locks, worn loose, were carried with the warm breeze as her rhythm built up into a furious finale, ending with a single, loud thud.

Lily opened her eyes, breathing heavily, and was surprised to see Luke kneeling a short distance in front of her, his medical bag beside him and a smile on his lips, but his eyes showed that he didn't quite know what to make of this.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey back," Lily answered, softly smiling at him.

While Luke was still trying to find a way to ask her what she was doing without sounding

overprotective--he knew how much she hated that--Lily provided an answer. "I just felt the urge to be alone and beat my drum." She lifted the instrument off her leg and laid it onto the bag, then unfolded her legs, wincing. "How long have I been here?" She wiggled her feet and started massaging her thighs.

Luke leaned forward and slid his hands beneath the hem of her dress to massage her calves, shaking his head. "At least an hour. That's only since you began drumming."

Her eyes grew wide as she slowly, carefully shifted and got up onto her knees. "It seemed like a few minutes."

Luke stood to help her get up. When she was on her feet, Lily kissed him on the cheek, then took a step back, looking at him, an eyebrow cocked. "You've been worried again, haven't you?" she chided.

Luke gave her a rueful smile. Since the Excalibur had left, he'd done a lot of research on multiple pregnancies, and also conferred with his colleague, Dr. Roberts, on Deneb IV, who had a bit more experience in this area. In addition to the usual higher risks of multiple compared to single pregnancies, Lily's size was an issue. The fact that both John and he were much taller than Lily meant that the babies would probably be big, relative to their mother. This could cause problems in the later stages of the pregnancy and at birth. Unlike Demon, Lily had politely but decidedly refused all his offers to check her over, not helping to soothe his worries, but rather, feeding them. Luke had found out the hard way a few weeks before that Lily didn't appreciate his new streak of protectiveness at all. They had made up and found a compromise in the end, and at least now she let him carry out a weekly examination, but only with the most basic tests! He didn't doubt that she had only agreed to this to keep the peace and to stop him from constantly nagging her, since she was apparently unconcerned that anything could go wrong with her pregnancy.

"You shouldn't go off alone, especially not for so long and so far away," he paused, then added, "and especially without telling anyone."

The look she gave him told him he had guessed right. Lily put a finger on his lips. "You know I wouldn't do anything to endanger our children."

"Not knowingly, at least," he interrupted softly.

"And I trust my hunches would warn me if something could happen. Plus, you know all of us are exceptionally healthy. I'm sure the Vorlon wanted to rule out any physical risk to their tools and erased any deficiencies that may have existed in that area, so you're looking at the fittest mum-to-be-of-twins in the universe."

Luke sighed and took her hands in his, looking into her eyes, once again captured by their incredible color and depth. "Since all evidence points that way, I can't argue the point, but sometimes I still can't help worrying about my Fire-Lily."

She smiled at her nickname. "Fire-Lily knows this, and appreciates your efforts not to worry very much." Her eyes sparkled as she remembered their first "marital dispute" as she liked to jokingly call it, when Luke had told her he thought it better for her and the babies if they stopped having sex. She'd convinced him to drop that silly idea pretty fast!

Luke bent down and kissed her softly, then held her face between his hands and asked, "So how are the fittest mum-to-be-of-twins and her passengers?"

"Translation: Why did I really come up here?" Lily grinned crookedly.

Luke nodded, smiling gently.

Lily's grin faded slowly, and she sighed. "To answer the obvious question, we're great, apart from the usual side effects. To answer the hidden question..." For a moment, Lily averted her eyes, and as she looked back up at him, he saw tears filling them. "We're missing John--terribly!"

Luke closed his arms around her as tightly as he could around her prominent bulge. "I miss him, too," he admitted softly. "We can only hope that he and the others will manage to make it back here soon."

Lily didn't bother to point out that John's latest message hadn't sounded very hopeful. Luke knew that as well as she did, and their hope was all they had.

Lily turned around in Luke's embrace and leaned her back against him, her hands entwining with his in front of her shoulders. His eyes followed her gaze out over the landscape, to the castle they called their home, their thoughts with the ones who had left them, hoping against hope that they would return soon.

Ilas and Dureena walked back through the woods together, both laden with the results of the day's hunting party. Dureena had taught Ilas and the Brakiri how to use slingshots to bring down flyers, which significantly reduced the damage to the meat and improved the strike rate, compared with their previous use of rather cumbersome crossbows. They both enjoyed going out with the Brakiri from the village to help hunt down the local avians. It had the dual effect of keeping crop destruction to a minimum and providing meat for the castle and the village. Today's hunt had been particularly successful, with a large number of the local flyers having been brought down. The cook would be pleased, as the supply he kept in storage had been getting low.

Dureena had several of the carcasses hung over her shoulder. Each had been carefully declawed and beheaded before being tied together by the feet. The teeth and claws were extremely venomous to the Brakiri and while she had no idea how they would affect a Zanderi, Dureena preferred not to find out. Ilas had told her how she'd once been bitten by one of the avians. Apart from a nasty laceration, it had had no real affect, but that was Ilas. No one knew quite what she was and she certainly couldn't be used to predict the reactions of any other species to the avians' poison. So before the hunting party moved the bodies, all venomous parts were carefully removed, leaving only the meaty parts that made such good eating for the occupants of the village and castle.

When they had reached the lake, Ilas and Dureena decided to stop for a swim, so they passed their trophies to the rest of the hunting party. Once the Brakiri had left, they quickly stripped and dove into the pool, splashing each other and playing in the water, but then quickly admitted to each other that they felt tired at the end of the day's activities, so they stretched out on the flat rocks to dry in the late afternoon sun. Ilas rested her head against Dureena's flat stomach and looked down at her own rounded belly.

"It just keeps getting bigger every day. I know I'm not as big as Demon, and by comparison to Lily, I have almost no bump at all, but I'm really starting to feel the difference."

Dureena stretched her arm to stroke the soft golden skin of Ilas' belly. "They do that you know. Babies--they do just get bigger."

Ilas could hear the pain and longing in Dureena's voice. Although nearly four months had passed since she'd lost her baby, she still carried the grief and anger close to her heart. Ilas rolled on to her side to look up at her friend. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to remind you."

Dureena smiled sadly. "Everything reminds me." She reached down to stroke Ilas' purple hair, then moved her hand to caress the scar that marked her cheek. "But the pain does lessen. Every day it gets a little easier to bear, and having a friend like you helps a lot."

Ilas shifted to snuggle close to Dureena's side, resting her head on the Zanderi's shoulder and hugging her close. "I've never had a friend before. I mean, my sisters have always been there, and I love them and they love me, but to have a friend is different. I'm glad you're my friend."

The two women lay next to each other, watching the sun slowly sinking to the horizon, the light catching in the waterfall on the far side of the lake and creating rainbows in the mist. Dureena continued to stroke Ilas' hair, then spoke softly, "I'll kill him one day. I don't know how or when, but I will kill him."

Ilas didn't need to ask who Dureena was talking about. They both longed for the day when they would be able to take their revenge on Lucas, the man who had stolen the life of Dureena's baby and taken Ilas' sister away from her. He had caused them both great pain, and neither of them was of a temperament to forgive or forget.

Ilas whispered softly, "And I'll help you. I don't care if Demon says that killing is bad. I want to kill him and I want to kill him as slowly and painfully as possible." She started to giggle, "Which part of him shall we cut off first? Something that's nice and painful, but won't kill him too quickly. How about we start by tying a really tight wire around each finger, then when they swell up, we can..." She lifted her head to whisper into Dureena's ear. Dureena started to laugh.

They lay in the sunset, plotting the damage they intended to do to Lucas when they caught him.

When she was alone in the apartment like this, when Lucas was off doing whatever it was that he did, (she never questioned him; she'd learned the hard way that Lucas did whatever he wanted and it wasn't her place to question him,) Angel couldn't fight the thoughts and memories that came rushing in on her, threatening to overwhelm and crush her with their intensity. It had been nearly four months since they'd arrived here on Babylon 5. Nearly four months since she'd been taken away from her home and her sisters, from everything that she'd loved and depended on.

Angel stood, staring out of the porthole, not really seeing the activity outside. She took in a deep breath and tried to fight the memories, but they forced themselves upon her, unstoppable as always. Lucas had told her she would get by, which was true most of the time, but at times, especially when she was alone, when Lucas wasn't with her, the pain of no longer being connected to her sisters was almost unbearable. She'd also quickly discovered that with her link broken, she no longer had the ability to move things. It was then that she first felt hatred for Lucas. She found now that she not only loved him, but hated him, too. She suspected that he really didn't love her as he said he did, that he was just using her, but she would talk herself out of believing those thoughts. He wouldn't have brought her with him if he didn't love her, or so she had thought.

Angel sat up, unable to lie still as she thought more about Lucas and their time on Babylon 5.

Memories of their arrival flashed in her mind, but she forced them away. What had happened with Galen was too hard to think about. Instead she focused on how, since their arrival, Lucas had in no time at all amassed a fortune, and seemed to have many people indebted to him. She didn't think much of it, especially not after Lucas had explained to her that he was doing just what he had in Trinity, giving a helping hand to those who needed it.

At first he'd left her to her own devices, but soon he'd told her that he needed her help. Again, feelings of hatred crept over her as she remembered the things that she'd done for Lucas---things that made her feel guilty and disgusted with herself. She'd fought against them, but Lucas punished her cruelly for defying him, and then told her that if she loved him, then she would help him. So she'd done what he'd asked, and each time she followed his orders, another part of her died inside. She was completely lost in Lucas, becoming someone she could barely recognize. Angel shook her head, clearing away those thoughts. She was never able to allow herself to see what being with Lucas had cost her.

She leaned back against the sofa and closed her eyes as her thoughts drifted to her sisters. She wondered what they were doing and how they felt about her now that she was no longer joined with them.

"They're probably happy that I'm gone," Angel whispered bitterly. Her sisters were probably relieved that she and Lucas were gone. She knew that they hated Lucas, and that if they'd stayed, they would have done whatever they could to destroy him. She knew she believed those thoughts because it was easier to be bitter than sad, but she also knew that Lucas held great influence over her. Several times now, he'd told her that her sisters would never forgive her for what she'd done. She'd cried and argued, saying that eventually they would come to accept him once they saw that he didn't intend to harm them and she was happy, but Lucas had chuckled coldly and informed her that not even her sisters could be that forgiving. Something had set a warning bell off in her head, and she'd asked him, "Was what I did that bad, Lucas?" Angel was suddenly afraid that it was.

Lucas had looked at her oddly, and then shook his head. " No, darlin'. All you did was bring back the man you love."

She'd nodded, and needing comfort, moved into his arms. "Yes, that's all I did. No one was hurt this time." Angel had looked up at him and saw a flash of something dark and frightening in his eyes, but it was gone in a moment, and she'd thought she'd imagined it.

Angel started to cry as grief washed over her. She thought about Lily and Ilas, but mostly about Demon. She missed her sisters so much it was like a physical pain that robbed her of her breath as she wrapped her arms around herself, and she sobbed as she wondered for the hundredth time since arriving on Babylon 5, [Was it worth it?]

She stood up abruptly, forcing those negative thoughts away. She loved Lucas more than she hated him, and she didn't want to be without him. When she thought about what it would be like to not be with him, it hurt so much that it made it hard to breathe. She just had to deal with being without her sisters. [Hell, they're probably all doing fine without me.] She turned to look out of the porthole again, brushing tears from her cheeks.

The soft sound of the door opening made her turn around to see Lucas entering the apartment. Her heart turned over at the sight of him, dressed in black jeans and a maroon silk shirt. He gave her that lazy smile and as always when he looked at her like that, or when she was with him, all bad thoughts faded away, forgotten for the moment.

Angel moved from the porthole and ran to throw her arms around him. "Oh, Lucas, I missed you so much," she said breathlessly as she held herself tightly against him.

"Well, darlin', I guess I should make it up to you, then," he said, lifting his hands to hold her face. Anything she was going to say was cut off as Lucas claimed her mouth in a deep, passionate kiss. Her heart and pulse raced as she felt herself lifted into his arms. Angel pulled her mouth away from his and looked lovingly into his eyes as he carried her through to the bedroom. Once again, she was totally lost in him, unable to think about anything else.

A stray thought lagged, [When you're alone again, you'll still have those thoughts; they'll never go away.] but then Lucas lowered her to the bed, his hands undoing the zipper of her one-piece suit, revealing her breasts and he lowered his mouth to a nipple. The thought disappeared into the darkest part of her mind--the part of her mind that she ignored when it told her, [He's going to destroy you.]

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The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

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