

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn - Part 3: Present Perfect

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Two names with the same five letters and in both cases they spell trouble...

Chapter 3

Gideon returned to Deborah's rooms in the late afternoon. He felt hot and sticky. The particles of soot from the earlier incident had worked their way into crevices around his body that were extremely uncomfortable, but it had been a successful day. He and Matheson had trained fifty of the Brakiri 'guards' in the use of PPG handguns and rifles. He smiled at the term 'guards'. If he'd known when they first arrived on Eriadne that these so-called guards were actually villagers with little skill or training in weapons, that original visit might have gone a little differently. But for now, all he wanted was to shower off the dirt and sweat and find Deborah.

He'd seen her briefly at lunch, when he and John had dashed in, grabbed a quick snack and gone straight back to their task. Gideon thought she'd seemed subdued and the bright, happy mood she'd been in earlier in the day had faded. He'd watched as Deborah pushed food around her plate, her appetite apparently having deserted her again. She'd made an effort to brighten up when he and John had joined them, but it was obvious that it was an effort. Gideon wondered what had happened to upset her that morning. Obviously, something had.

When he walked into the bedroom, Gideon found that Deborah was asleep, curled up on her side, completely still, with a sheet drawn up to her neck. This was quite unlike her usual sprawled position. He didn't disturb her, but moved into the bathroom, pulling the door closed behind him. He stripped quickly and stood under the shower, luxuriating in the hot water. If he had to sum up the pleasures of Eriadne, there was no doubt that Deborah would come at the top of the list, but a constant and apparently endless supply of hot water would come in a close second. He scrubbed and rinsed until every particle of soot was removed from his skin and hair, then left the shower feeling clean in a way that only actual water could produce.

Towel-drying his hair, Gideon walked quietly into the bedroom to see if Deborah was still asleep. She was asleep, but she certainly wasn't still. Her head was rolling back and forth across the pillow and her limbs moved jerkily. Her face was drawn in pain and she was talking in her sleep. The words were slurred and he couldn't make out what she was saying, but she was obviously in some distress. He moved quickly to the bed, sitting on the edge and pulling her into his arms. Deborah awoke slowly as Gideon held her, stroking her hair and whispering reassurances. He watched as her eyes gradually focused as she came out of her nightmare. She buried her head in his shoulder and clung to him tightly as he continued to rock her gently.

After a little while, Deborah's head came up and without saying a word, she moved her hand behind his neck and pulled him down into a kiss. Gideon felt himself responding to the urgency and passion of her mouth on his and was soon as aroused as she was. He slipped into the bed next to her and for the next hour they explored each other's bodies, finding old and new ways to give each other pleasure, slowly bringing each other to climax.

Gideon lay on his side next to her, recovering, caressing her breasts and belly as Deborah lay on her back with her eyes closed. He spoke for the first time since entering the bedroom. "You were having a nightmare, and you weren't yourself at lunch. What's wrong?"

Deborah shook her head without speaking.

"Don't do that. If there's a problem, tell me. I may not be able to do anything, but I'm damned sure I can't help if you won't tell me," he said.

Deborah lay very still while she considered. She kept her eyes closed as she eventually said, "Angel."

Gideon flinched, glad that she couldn't see his reaction. Angel and Galen represented the biggest problems in his relationship with Deborah. Two names with the same five letters and in both cases they spelled trouble.

She rolled onto her side and opened her eyes. "What are you going to do if Lucas brings Angel with him? I'm sure she won't do anything to hurt anyone, but she could stop you in the same way as she has before."

Gideon nodded. "I know. That's why we've trained so many guards. I want to overwhelm her. I know she struggled to keep hold of sixteen of us when we first arrived, even though she was linked to the rest of you. And when she brought Lucas back and was working alone, it was an effort for her to hold five of us in place in the dining room when we really tried to break free. I figure if there are enough of us, she can't control us all."

Deborah looked at him, her concern obvious. "What if she and Lucas have found a way to combine powers and she's stronger now. What then?"

"Then I'll shoot Lucas. I promise I'll do everything I can not to hurt Angel."

Deborah rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. "There are three people on this planet who won't be affected by anything Angel can do. Where do we feature in your plans?"

Gideon shook his head again. "You don't. I don't want you anywhere near that courtyard. I want you in the infirmary with your sisters. Max, Luke, Sarah, Alwyn, and a few of the guards will be with you as a last line of defense if all else fails. But it won't come to…,"

Deborah interrupted him. "It might if you don't use every resource available to you. What could Luke and the others do if Lucas gets past the rest of you? Matthew, look at this professionally for a moment, not personally. Should you leave your most effective defense unused? If you arm Lily, Ilas, and me, then if all else fails we can shoot Lucas. And Angel would never do anything to harm us, whatever you think her capable of."

Gideon paused and thought about what she'd said. She was right; he was looking at this personally, but how could he not? His child was at risk, as well as Deborah, but from a professional point of view, she and her sisters represented their best chance of dealing with Lucas. Gideon decided it didn't matter. He couldn't handle the thought of his lover being anywhere near the fight. He reached out to stroke her cheek.

"No. I want you out of the way. You'd distract me and Lily would distract John. Anyway, Alwyn can do a hell of a lot to protect you if necessary. Just let us do our jobs; we'll capture Lucas and Angel and hold them until we can take them back to the Excalibur and charge them."

He saw her stiffen and close her eyes. Deborah spoke softly. "And then you'll prosecute them, find them guilty and kill them."

"No! That's not my job. In this area I'm like a policeman. I only charge them, it's someone else's job to decide guilt or innocence. Even if they *are* found guilty, they won't be killed."

She rolled back onto her side and stared at him. "No, you don't do anything that merciful. You destroy everything that makes them who they are and leave the empty husk to walk around 'serving society'. I can't think of anything worse than seeing my sister's body inhabited by another personality, knowing that she won't even recognize me as her sister. I can't let you do that." Deborah's voice became colder with every word and Gideon watched as the expressionless mask she wore when she placed herself under tight control descended over her face.

He spoke without thought for the consequences. "You can't stop me. It's my job and I made a promise to Dureena that I'd do that job. If you're so sure Angel is innocent why should you worry? Don't get between me and doing this, Deborah, or we'll both regret it." Immediately when the words had been spoken, Gideon wished he could retract them and rephrase them in a way that sounded less of a threat and showed his genuine concern for her safety and well-being. But it was too late; the words hung in the air between them.

He watched her carefully, looking for any clues as to what she might do next, but her face was unreadable. Gideon started to speak, "Look, I didn't mean…," but Deborah interrupted.

"I understood very clearly what you meant. I don't want to discuss this any further until I've had time to think. It's nearly time for dinner and I'd be grateful if you could advise the others that I'm tired and

staying in my rooms. Please leave. We can discuss this later." Gideon winced; he hated that icy politeness, delivered in that cool controlled English accent, each word precisely enunciated.

He tried again. "Look, Deborah, let me explain…"

She stopped him again. "Later. Not now. I would very much appreciate some time to myself now. Please go."

Gideon gave up. She wasn't going to listen to him now. Maybe later when they'd both had time to think, they could talk this through. He climbed out of bed, collected clean clothes from the wardrobe, and dressed quickly. Turning back to the bed he saw that Deborah had curled up on her side again and had her eyes tightly shut. He moved to the side of the bed and kissed her forehead before speaking. "I'll go and I'll tell the others about dinner, but when I get back we must talk this through. We have to find a way around this." She neither moved nor spoke, so he left the room quietly, pulling the door closed behind him.

Gideon walked to the window of the living room, looking out at the sunset, which was as spectacular as always. He wondered if every day of this visit was going to be spoiled by a disagreement about Galen or Angel. As he tried to work out what he could say to move them forward, he heard a click behind him. He turned, puzzled for a moment, then realizing what it was, strode to the bedroom door and grabbed the handle, twisting hard. Nothing. Deborah had locked him out. He bolted for the bathroom door, but it was too late. By the time he reached the entrance from the bathroom to the bedroom, she had that door locked, too.

He hammered on the door, shouting, "Don't do this! The problems won't go away just by locking me out!" Silence was his only reply.

Gideon took a deep breath and turned away. He could try to break the door down, but it was heavy, and he doubted if he could kick it in. Even if he could, what would that resolve? If she was that desperate to stay away from him, then forcing the issue wasn't going to help. He decided to do as she asked and give her some time. Maybe it would give him chance to think of some answers as well. He left Deborah's rooms cursing his own stupidity in saying what he had, but knowing that one way or another the issue of Angel would have come between them at some time. Better now than when Angel and Lucas arrived.

Dinner that night was a subdued affair. Max, Ilas, and Dureena were still out at the ruins. Max had promised to get back that night, and knowing Max, he'd turn up a minute before midnight. Gideon had delivered Deborah's message and watched as Lily closed her eyes, obviously making mental contact with her sister. Whatever was exchanged between them left Lily looking concerned and unhappy. Her mood affected Luke and John, who were never the liveliest members of the party, anyway.

Sarah and Alwyn kept a conversation going about the work being done on the viral screen and from what Gideon could gather, Alwyn was optimistic that he could contribute something to Sarah's work. But Gideon wasn't really paying attention, however, and became aware that his own silence was contributing to the dark atmosphere that hung over the table.

But Gideon didn't want to talk; he wanted to think about what he should do next. Should he try to get Dureena to release him from his promise? At best, it was a pathetic attempt on his part to paper over the cracks of his own responsibility for the loss of her child, but his self-respect demanded that he

should follow through on it. Did the promise mean that much to her, anyway? Gideon suspected that it did, and he couldn't see any chance of her releasing him from it. Part of him resented even having to think about asking. Whatever Deborah and Lily said about Angel not having known what she was doing, she was still partly responsible for the death of Dureena's child. Why should he be asked to ignore that, just because Angel was his lover's sister? He could feel himself becoming angry at what Deborah expected of him.

But Gideon could understand her point of view. In Deborah's eyes, an evil man had manipulated her sister into doing something bad. Angel was entirely ignorant of the consequences of her actions; should she pay the ultimate penalty for that ignorance? That wasn't his decision, thank God, all he had to do was present her to a court and leave that to them, but even that act could be enough to destroy his relationship with Deborah. She would never forgive Gideon if Angel were convicted and mind-wiped and Dureena would never forgive him if he failed to bring her to justice. A classic no-win situation, damned if he did and damned if he didn't.

Was he going to have to choose which was most important to him: His principles or his love for Deborah and their son? Gideon didn't want to have to make that choice, and he resented being put in the position where he might have to. The danger was that his resentment would find its usual target, Angel, who was the root cause of so many of his problems. If Angel hadn't brought Lucas back, then Dureena would never have lost her baby, Gideon wouldn't be there now, putting his career at risk by going AWOL, Deborah wouldn't be in danger from Lucas, and Angel wouldn't have placed herself in danger of mind-wiping. When it came down to it, it was all Angel's fault.

Gideon sighed. He knew he was being unfair. Angel was young and inexperienced and Lucas had ruthlessly manipulated her at every step along the way. It was a miracle that she'd ever found the strength to resist Lucas the first time, when he'd taken over Gideon's body. She'd actively participated in rescuing Gideon from oblivion and he was well aware that he'd never thanked her for it. Instead, he'd physically and verbally abused her. If he'd treated her more kindly, would she have turned to Lucas? The load of guilt Gideon carried weighed down on him again, dissipating much of his anger. This whole mess was his own fault. He had no right to resent the choices he now faced; he'd brought them on himself.

Gideon roused himself and became aware that a plate of food sat untouched and cold in front of him, and that the table was in silence. John and Sarah were both watching him with some concern. Alwyn had left without him noticing and Lily looked as if she were going to cry at any moment. Luke had his arm around her and squeezed her shoulders gently, trying to comfort her.

Gideon pulled himself together and spoke to them all. "I'm sorry, I guess I haven't been very good company this evening. I know we're all concerned about what will happen tomorrow. We don't know when Lucas will arrive, but Galen should be able to give us a reasonable amount of warning." He looked at Lily and smiled. "Don't worry, we're going to make sure that no one gets hurt and nothing is going to happen to Deborah." He stood before he continued. "I think the best thing for everyone would be to get a good night's sleep and be fresh for tomorrow. I'll see you all at breakfast." Gideon left the dining room fully aware that the muted buzz of conversation he could hear was about him and Deborah.

He detoured via the Guard Captain's office on his way back to Deborah's rooms, stopping only long enough to make a request, then moved on to the kitchen. A few minutes later, he left with a tray piled high with covered plates of bread, cheese, meats, and fruit. There was much more than one person could eat but the cook had been worried when he'd heard that Deborah had missed dinner and he had insisted on loading the tray. He'd wanted to send one of his staff to carry it, but Gideon had declined

politely, saying he could manage it himself.

Reaching her rooms, Gideon put the tray down on the table and went to check the door to the bedroom. Still locked. He contemplated yelling through the door but decided to wait. Spending the night on the sofa or letting Deborah sleep alone were not options for consideration. Gideon sat on the sofa and picked up a book.

John Matheson watched Gideon as he left the dining room, deeply concerned, and barely aware that Sarah was saying something in a low voice and Lily was answering. Matthew and Demon must have had a serious falling out for her to not even join them at dinner and for Gideon not to make even the slightest effort to listen to what Sarah and Alwyn had said about their research concerning the viral screen. The aura, first of anger, then of guilt, that his friend had emanated again, weighed down on his own soul. [If only he wouldn't be so Goddamn taciturn!]

John felt Lily squeeze his hand, and found her looking at him with tears in her eyes. "You can't do anything, John. They have to work it out themselves," she whispered, her voice raw.

He squeezed back, giving her a sad smile. "Angel." No question.

Lily just looked at him for a long while, then sighed.

They walked back to Lily's room silently.

Raven was thinking about what John and Lily had told him when he'd come back from his briefing with Sarah and Alwyn, and what had just happened. It had been inevitable, really, that sooner or later, Gideon and Demon would clash over the fate of her sister. He just hoped for their sake that they could work it out somehow, before Lucas--and maybe Angel, too--arrived. If they didn't, that could well mean the death stroke to their relationship, despite their obvious love for each other.

John absentmindedly walked alongside Lily and Luke. He cursed himself. If only he'd realized. If only he'd been able to do something about that damned Box before they'd come to Eriadne. [Stop it, or you'll end up like Gideon! You can't change the past, and berating yourself for things you could or could not have done back then won't help! Concentrate on things you *can* do something about.]

Raven's arm was still around her shoulder, John's around her waist, but Lily hardly noticed them as she walked automatically. She had to fight hard to keep her composure as her mind reeled. She knew how much Demon loved Gideon, and how much he loved her. She respected the Captain as a loyal, honorable, though troubled man, and it just wasn't fair that his commitment to keeping his promise to Dureena would tear him and Demon apart. [It isn't fair!] Deep down inside, she could feel her anger well up and knew she wouldn't be able to quench it.

As the door closed behind them, Lily couldn't suppress her boiling anger any longer and broke free of her men's embrace before she could say or do something stupid. Instead she rushed over to the lounging pit, fell down onto her knees in its middle and started beating her fists on the cushions, accompanied by short high-pitched screams, venting all the anger, fear, and frustration she felt inside. "Damn you, Lucas! Damn what you did to us!" she shouted, the words barely recognizable amidst her sobs. A blood-curdling scream rose from her throat.

John and Luke stood just inside the door, too shocked to react as they watched Lily go berserk. They had never seen her like this; even that one time she had directed her anger at Luke, it had been a controlled explosion, but this... Lily's scream finally snapped Luke out of his paralysis and he rushed over, closely followed by John, who got down behind Lily and managed to bring his arms around her ribcage just under her breasts, pressing her against his chest to restrain her, surprised by the strength she exhibited in resisting him. "Lily, stop it! Please!" She didn't even seem to hear him.

After being hit by her a few times, Luke got hold of her wrists and held them tightly as he shouted, "Lilith! Think about what you're doing to the babies!"

Suddenly Lily stopped thrashing and for a moment was totally still, staring at Luke, tears streaming down her face. Then she went limp in John's arms and started sobbing again, her head rolling back against his shoulder, eyelids closed in exhaustion.

Luke let go of her wrists--he'd held them so tightly they were red--and she immediately embraced her bulging belly.

"Forgive me," she whispered, feeling her children's confusion and sending them reassurances.

"Shh. It's OK," Luke whispered, kissing her forehead and softly stroking her hair while John rocked her gently, his cheek resting on hers, his mental presence reassuring and calming her.

"Why did he have to do this?" Lily asked weakly, her voice barely audible.

"I wish I knew," Luke answered softly. "Maybe not even he knows that." He wiped the tears from her cheeks. "Sleep now. You need some rest."

When he looked at John he could see his own worries reflected in the young Asian's eyes.

Angel lay curled up on the bed, in the cabin that she and Lucas shared. They'd been in hyperspace for a day now, and with every passing minute she knew they were getting closer and closer to Eriadne. Each of those minutes added to the panic welling up inside her.

She turned on her back and stared at the ceiling, wondering what might await them there. Had Gideon gotten the message? Would he have acted on it? After she'd sent it, she suddenly panicked that with it being anonymous, he might ignore it. And if he did act on it, what did he have planned for Lucas? What would be waiting for them when they arrived? Would he just attack without warning? Surely not, surely he must give them a chance to surrender. But would Lucas allow himself to be captured? What if Gideon killed Lucas when he refused? Her heart contracted at the thought, and she closed her eyes, fighting back tears. Over the past twenty-four hours she'd been unable to think of anything else. She wanted Lucas stopped; she couldn't allow him to harm Demon but… [Oh God, what will I do if he's killed?] As much as she wanted him stopped, she couldn't bear the thought of him dying. She knew why that was. She loved him, despite *everything* that he'd done to her, had made her do, and was threatening to do. She LOVED him.

Angel opened her eyes and let out a sigh. During the past few days Lucas had been uncharacteristically

considerate and gentle with her. but she knew why that was. The incident with Smith had been his fault. She shook her head; no, that wasn't entirely true. She'd made her own contribution to that incident. If she hadn't given herself to Lucas body and soul, if she'd had the strength to walk away from him, she would never have ended up in that state. All her problems and difficulties arose from her own inability to say no to Lucas or to leave him. If she were stronger, if she weren't so afraid of him, then much of her own and other people's pain could have been prevented.

Angel turned on her side and pushed those thoughts away. There was no point in thinking about them now. What she did let herself think about was Lucas, and his gentleness towards her. It was so hard to resist him when he was being so kind. The warmth in his eyes, the soft seductive drawl of his voice, the gentleness of his kisses, all of these sapped her will. She wanted to keep him at arms length, fearing that if she allowed him to seduce her, to make love to her, she would crumble and confess to what she'd done. Then Lucas would kill her. There was no doubt about that; Lucas would definitely kill her this time. With hindsight, Angel was amazed that he hadn't killed her for her part in sending him back to the Box. He'd killed others for less, that was for sure. So her only defense was to keep him away. If she could just keep him away, resist, not succumb to his charm for the rest of this journey, then she'd be safe. Demon would take care of her.

"What's the matter, darlin'? Can't sleep?" Angel jumped at the sound of Lucas's soft drawl and looked up to see him standing in the doorway. She pushed away her thoughts as he sauntered into the room and came around to sit on the bed beside her.

She smiled, "I guess I wasn't as tired as I thought."

Lucas gave her a lazy smile as his eyes roamed down her body, taking in the lacy black slip she was wearing. She could see the hunger in his eyes and felt herself melting under that look.

"Well, I know cure for that." Angel's heart leapt into her throat at the low seductive tone in his voice. She knew what he wanted and she wanted it, too. She knew that she could no longer pull away; he was not a patient man, and would become suspicious if she tried to come up with another excuse not to make love with him. And a big part of her didn't want to. It had been days since they last made love and she missed him terribly. The sound of his voice was enough to make her nipples harden and the way he was looking at her now created warmth deep down inside her. All resistance broke.

"Really? I didn't know that you were a doctor." Her voice was deep and husky with desire.

He arched an eyebrow and gave her a wicked smile just as he placed his arms on either side of her and leaned in close, making her lie back flat on the mattress. "Oh, I know where to put a thermometer, darlin'." He looked deep into her eyes, and then lowered his head until his mouth was just barely touching hers and whispered, "I'll start here, but I've got lots of other places in mind." Then he claimed her mouth in a gentle, tender kiss.

Angel didn't resist, but opened her mouth to the gentle invasion and as his tongue met hers, she suddenly realized that this would probably be the last time she would ever be with him, and in that moment she wanted him more than anything. She wanted to make love with him one last time and for a few hours just let herself believe that he loved her and that nothing bad had happened or was going to happen.

Lucas felt her arms move around his shoulders, her hand entwining in his hair, pulling him closer to her, and he smiled inwardly. He'd come in here expecting her to pull away from him again, but he felt her body trembling beneath him with desire. He was pleased. Her recent behavior had started to make

him suspicious, and he'd begun to believe that he would have to force the situation and find out what was bothering her, but clearly, she'd gotten over whatever it was. He concentrated on taking it slowly, building her desire to the point where she would beg him to take her.

Angel felt herself spinning as he deepened the kiss, her body starting to leap into flames. When he eventually broke the kiss, she looked up into his eyes as he said, "Darlin', I do believe that you're runnin' a fever. Maybe we'd better cool you down." Lucas slipped his hand beneath the strap of her slip and started to slide it off her shoulder, trailing soft kisses down her shoulder and neck as he did so. Then he moved to her other shoulder and did the same, gently pulling at the slip until her breasts were bared. He blew onto her nipples, watching as they hardened.

Lucas arched his eyebrow and sat up straight, rubbing his chin and frowning. "Now that often means that a lady's cold. Your symptoms are confusin' the doctor, darlin'. I think I'm gonna have to conduct a more thorough examination."

Angel feigned a sad expression and nodded. "I think I'm very sick, Doctor. I need intensive care." Then she smiled wickedly, all doubts and reservations gone as she melted under his smile and touch.

Lucas lowered his head to her breast and gently licked the hardened nipple, then took it into his mouth to suck and softly nip the bud between his teeth. He heard Angel moan with pleasure at the sensation and drew back for a moment. He looked down at her and smiled. "Definite tenderness in that area. Seems a little over sensitive to me. Now I wonder where else you might have that problem?" He repeated the action on her other breast, again drawing a moan of pleasure from her.

He drew back again and considered her seriously. "Oh, I can see that this is going to be a difficult case. Maybe I'd better take a closer look." Lucas slid the black lace slip down over her hips, lifting her gently from the bed as he pulled it from under her, then threw it on the floor. He looked back to where Angel lay naked beneath him, now fully healed, showing no signs of the injuries she'd received, but he knew she was still in some discomfort so he wanted to go as slowly as she needed. But it was going to be difficult. Her perfect body just begged to be fucked and Lucas was just the man to do it. He let his eyes run down from the beautiful heavy breasts with their nipples standing erect with her desire, to her flat stomach and tiny waist, past the slim swelling of her hips to that dark triangle that pulled his eyes like a magnet. His hands itched to part those white slender thighs and slip between them, but he held back, for the moment, at least. He kissed her navel then sat back again. "Turn over, darlin'. When I do a physical, I start from the bottom up."

Angel giggled softly as she turned and heard him sigh as he looked at her perfect back and buttocks. Lifting her hair aside, he kissed the nape of her neck and started downwards. By the time he reached her feet, he had touched, kissed, licked, and sucked every centimeter of her skin on the way. She was on the brink of orgasm and he had yet to start on her front. She felt the bed move as Lucas stood and she turned her head to watch him undress. Angel wet her lips as she saw his hard cock spill out of his briefs as he stripped them off. It had been so long since she'd seen it or touched it. She longed to taste him again, to close her lips around him, to feel Lucas filling her mouth and throat. She started to move towards him, but he stopped her with a look. "Oh no, Angel-Face, don't forget--today you're the *patient*. You'd better *practice* that."

She fell back on the bed and felt his hand slide under her hip, then he flipped her onto her back. Angel watched as he moved to the end of the bed and lifted her foot to his mouth. He licked and sucked on each toe, bringing her back to the edge of orgasm, then started working up her feet, ankles, calves, knees, and thighs. By the time his head was between her legs and his fingers stroking her inner thighs she was burning with passion. She'd never wanted Lucas inside her as much as she did then. "Oh

gods, please, Lucas. Please, now."

He kissed the lips of her opening, then parted them, touching the tip of his tongue to her clitoris. Angel exploded into orgasm, harder and faster than she'd ever done before. Wave after wave of pleasure coursed through her, and every time she started to subside, his tongue would find her most sensitive spot and lift her straight back to climax. Her whole body was lifting from the bed as she spasmed with the pleasure Lucas gave her. When she was finally screaming at him, begging him to stop before she fainted, he slowed the movement of his mouth and tongue and withdrew from between her legs.

Lucas lifted himself above her, positioning his swollen cock at her entrance. "It's time to play hide the thermometer, darlin'."

Angel let out a soft gasp as he gently entered her, slowly, deliberately, moving deeper inside her as he lowered his mouth to hers. Her arms came up around his shoulders, holding him close to her as he began to move in and out of her. Lucas kissed her passionately, savoring the sweet taste of her mouth as their tongues entwined.

He continued to kiss her until she was sure she would faint. Then he broke the kiss and looked deeply into her eyes for a moment before he lowered his mouth to her neck, kissing his way up to her ear, which he took in his mouth and suckled. Her body trembled beneath him as it experienced the incredible sensations from the attention of his mouth and his slow, rhythmic thrusts.

Angel was lost, floating in a sea of fire and she tightened her hold on his shoulders for a moment, letting her fingers rake up and down his back. But when Lucas moved into her again with another gentle thrust, her body shuddered, her arms dropped from his shoulders and she grasped hold of the sheets tightly. She moaned with desire as she felt his hands on her breasts, kneading them, his fingers rubbing her nipples as he started kissing and licking, first along one shoulder then the other. Her breathing became ragged as he licked the length of the scar on her shoulder. She was beginning to feel herself falling and she spread her legs further, wanting him to go deeper inside her.

Lucas felt Angel shifting her position and he stopped kissing her, watching her face. Her eyes were closed and her lips parted, her face flushed with desire as he kept up the rhythm of his thrusts. He raised himself up on his arms and thrust into her deeper, relishing the feel of her warm tight walls wrapped around his cock. He could see she was close to release, as was he. But he didn't want them to come yet.

Angel's eyes snapped open as she felt his thrusts stop. A feeling of desperation washed over her, and she looked up at him. Her breath was taken away as she saw the look of dark hungry passion in his hazel eyes as he looked at her.

"Now you are warming my mercury, darlin' & hellip;" She watched speechless as he paused, and just watched her intently. When Lucas continued, his voice was low and seductive. "Let's just pull it out and take a readin', shall we?" Angel cried out in distress as she felt him start to move out of her, and her arms came up to grab hold of his shoulders.

"Please, Lucas, don't stop. Not now. Please." Her voice was filled with desperation. Then she noticed the wicked smile on his face, his hazel eyes actually twinkling and she realized he was teasing her. Angel brought her hands up to his neck and she pulled his head down, her mouth claiming his mouth in a bruising kiss. Then she pulled her mouth from his and let Lucas pull his head back slightly so she could look into his eyes.

"If you want to cure me, Doctor, you had better leave your thermometer where it is and keep moving." Lucas gave a deep chuckle, then his face became a mask of hunger, and not saying a word, he moved her hands from his neck, and entwining his hands with hers, he pinned them to the mattress above her head and began to move again. This time he thrust a little faster and harder, causing Angel to gasp in surprise at the change of pace. She lifted her hips to meet his thrusts. Her loud moans were cut off as he crushed his lips on hers, his thrusts bringing her closer and closer to climax.

Lucas felt her walls tightening and releasing as he pushed in deeper and harder, the pace almost frantic now. Her moans of passion pushed him to go faster. He broke the kiss as he thrust into her hard, taking her over into an earth-shattering orgasm. He heard Angel cry out his name as he thrust again, causing her walls to clamp around his cock as another orgasm ripped through her, making him come just as hard, his body shuddering as he filled her with his hot essence.

Angel opened her eyes, blue eyes meeting hazel as he lowered his mouth to hers, his tongue slipping past her lips into her mouth, kissing her with slow, intense desperation. When Lucas finally broke away, he gave her a slow, sexy smile and let go of her hands. He held her shoulders and then rolled off her onto his back, bringing her to lie against him with her chin resting on his chest. Both of them were trying to catch their breath.

As Angel lay against him, she noticed that for the first time since knowing him, his body was covered in a fine sheen of sweat. She touched her lips to his damp chest, kissing him, then licking her lips, tasting his unique flavor mixed with salt, and she smiled.

"Darlin', I think you gave me your fever." Angel flushed with pleasure at the way Lucas looked at her as he said those words.

"Oh dear, how awful." She laughed softly as his arm came around her, pulling her against him, so that he could kiss her again. When he pulled away, he stroked his thumb along her cheek and smiled. It was a smile that caused her stomach to flutter.

"No, darlin', wonderful." Angel was taken aback at the soft earnest tone, and suddenly she felt like crying. To hide her intense reaction she rested her head on his shoulder, her arm across his chest. They both lay in silence, basking in the afterglow while their bodies come down from the heights he had taken them to. They were both lost in their own private thoughts.

Lucas was pleased with how Angel had responded to him. He'd been getting pissed off with her pulling away from him; it kept drawing his attention away from his plans.

But clearly she was over whatever her problem was, leaving him free to keep his focus on his plan to get Demon. Lucas smiled; he had to admit that he'd missed the feel of her when he was inside her and how she responded so eagerly to his touch. Angel was the best lover he'd ever had. No other woman had given him as much pleasure as she had. Lucas closed his eyes and began to go over his plans again.

Angel lay against Lucas, her thoughts in chaos as her heart and mind battled against each other. Her heart was lost in her feelings for Lucas. She loved him, and at this moment her heart was screaming at her to not betray him, telling her that if she did, she would lose him forever. She was asking herself if she would be able to live with that. What would she do without him? [But he'll kill me if I tell him what I've done]. If she didn't, she could very well be sending him to his death. But if she loved him that much, and she was so afraid of him dying, would giving her own life up to prevent his death be so bad? Angel had once been afraid of dying, but over the past few months, she'd learned that there were

worse things than death.

Her heart having had its say, her mind then entered the discussion, asking her if in all the time she'd been with Lucas, had she ever been truly happy? Telling Angel that in her heart and in her soul, she knew what he was, and that he would never love her, never give her the happiness she so desperately wanted. If she told Lucas what awaited him on Eriadne, he would kill her. Where would that leave Demon and her son? Lucas would simply change his plans and she wouldn't be there to stop him. He always got what he wanted, and he would find a way to get past Gideon and take Demon. Then all she'd done would have been for nothing. Could she sacrifice Demon for Lucas?

Angel knew the answer to that was a resounding NO! She had done so much already to hurt her sisters, betrayed them by bringing back Lucas, endangering their lives by her selfishness. [No, this time I am not going to think about myself.] Demon's life depended on her keeping Lucas from finding out about her betrayal, but it was the hardest thing she'd ever had to do. She loved him more than anything, and he made her feel things that no other man ever could.

"Something on your mind, darlin'?" Angel went dead still. Had Lucas caught her thoughts? She pushed herself up on the arm pressed between their bodies and looked down at him, instantly relieved that he didn't have that dangerous look in his eyes.

"Just thinking how wonderful it is to lie here like this with you." It wasn't a complete lie. Lucas smiled, his hands came up to her face and he pulled her down to him. Her mouth opened willingly as their lips met. Angel drank in the taste of him as the kiss deepened, his tongue moving against hers. She felt his hands entwining in her hair, and she felt disappointed when he gently pulled on her hair, breaking the kiss.

Lucas didn't say anything to her, just looked at her, taking in the details of her face, her flushed cheeks, the visible freckles on her nose, and he looked deeply into her eyes, which were bright with an expression he couldn't quite make out.

Angel wanted to say something, but she was robbed of her voice by the way Lucas was looking at her. If she didn't know better, she could have sworn he was gazing at her in the same way she'd seen Gideon look at Demon. It almost broke her courage to stay silent and she let her eyes feast and burn into her mind how he looked at that moment.

He must have become aware of her intense regard as he arched his eyebrow and cocked his head to one side. "Angel-Face, you're staring as if you're never gonna see me again." Her eyes widened in surprise at how close to the mark he was.

"I'm staring at you because I…" Her voice suddenly caught, her throat tight with the threat of tears. Angel lowered her eyes, unable to look at him.

She was aware of his hand coming to her face to lift up her chin so that she had to look into his eyes. "Because what?" Lucas softly coaxed her to go on.

"Because I love you, Lucas." She let out a soft gasp of surprise as Lucas moved, turning her onto her back beneath him.

"I know you do, darlin'." His voice was low and arrogant. For a moment she'd hoped that he would say those three little words back. But Angel wasn't given a chance to dwell on how it broke her heart that he didn't.

Lucas lowered his mouth to her breast and began to suck on her nipple, causing it to harden instantly. For the next few hours, Lucas caressed, fondled, kissed, and teased her body, taking them to ecstasy and beyond over and over again. Each took turns to take the lead, touching and tasting the other's body, until they were finally sated and exhausted.

Angel lay cradled against Lucas, her head resting on one of his arms while the other arm was draped across her, holding her hand. She closed her eyes and let herself fall asleep for the last time in the arms of the man she loved.

Lucas sensed her falling asleep; he would have enjoyed staying there, even getting a couple of hours sleep himself, but they would be arriving at Eriadne in a few hours, and he had to finalize the pilot's role in kidnapping Demon. He would let Angel sleep for a couple of hours so she didn't walk in on their discussions. He gently pulled his arm out from under her head and pulled his hand free of hers, then carefully slipped out of the bed without waking her. Lucas dressed quickly but before leaving, moved over to the bed, and pulled the sheet up to cover her, taking a moment to enjoy how beautiful she looked. He bent forward and kissed her forehead, then straightened up and briefly let his thumb caress her cheek. He turned and left the cabin.

As Gideon had anticipated, it was a few minutes after midnight when there was a soft knock on the door to the living room. Answering it, he let Dureena into the room. She glanced around, then spoke quietly. "The guard on the gate told me you needed to see me as soon as I got back. What's the problem?"

Gideon pointed to the bedroom door. "I need you to pick a lock."

If Dureena had eyebrows they would have met her hairline. "She's locked you out?" She started to laugh. "What did you do? Forget to fold the towels in the bathroom or leave your dirty underwear on the floor? That woman has a fetish about tidiness. I don't know how you cope with sharing her rooms with her."

Gideon smiled back. "Well I'm pretty tidy myself after years of Earthforce training, but no, that's not why she locked me out. I told her not to get in the way of me arresting her sister and charging her with being an accessory to murder."

Dureena sat down hard on the sofa. She blew out a breath as she spoke. "That'd do it. I'm surprised you're still standing. She's fiercely protective of her sisters and damned touchy on the subject of Angel. You really told her you'd do that?"

Gideon nodded. "I made you a promise, Dureena. I told you that I'd never screw around with your trust and I intend to keep that promise. Angel and Lucas stole the life of your child and they'll pay for that. I don't know how guilty Angel is and it's not up to me to decide, but I'll keep my promise to you. I'll do my damndest to bring them to justice." It was the least he could do for her, knowing deep down that it could never be enough.

Dureena stared up at him. "Thank you. I thought you'd forgotten that promise."

"Never."

The little thief stood and moved to the door. "I don't know why you want me to let you in there. She'll never agree with you on this." She stooped to examine the lock.

"I know, but I have to try. I can't just walk away from her and my son, no matter how hard she pushes," Gideon grinned down at her as she went to work on the lock, "And she pushes damned hard at times."

Dureena produced a thin strip of metal from a concealed pocket and inserted it into the lock. A moment later Gideon heard a click as the lock opened and said, "You know you are entirely too good at that. I sometimes wonder if there is anything in my quarters on the Excalibur that you haven't examined in detail and rejected as not worth stealing."

She stood and grinned up at him, "Keep wondering. And good luck," then slid soundlessly from the room.

Gideon turned back to the table and picked up the tray before elbowing the door handle and pushing the door open. A peace offering seemed called for, but when he entered the room, he could see that Deborah was again turned on her side with her back to the door and hadn't seen or heard him enter. He thought for a moment that she was asleep, then he heard a soft moan and saw her shift her hand to her back, trying to rub the base of her spine as she gasped in pain. Gideon dropped the tray on the end of the bed and rushed around to the side that she faced. He fell to his knees by the side of the bed and lifted his hand to stroke her head.

"What's the matter? You're in pain. I'm calling Luke." He started to raise his arm and she grabbed it quickly.

"No, don't. This is normal. It's just false labor and it'll go away soon. It just hurts like hell for a bit." Deborah let out another grunt as another contraction hit her.

"What can I do? Is there anything I can do to help?" Gideon wanted desperately to make the pain go away. He suddenly realized just what lay ahead of her and it horrified him. Another wave of guilt crashed down on him. This was his fault, he'd done this to her and he wasn't even going to be with her when she went through labor. He was going to have to leave her to go through it alone.

Deborah was panting for breath and her face was screwed up in pain, but she managed to gasp out, "You can rub my back, please. It would help." He moved quickly around the bed and climbed onto the other side, moving behind her. He started to massage the base of her spine, pressing gently but firmly on either side of her spinal column, easing the knotted muscles he could feel there. Gradually, Gideon felt her relax and the muscles loosened under his touch. He heard Deborah sigh as the last of the pain left her. He lifted his hands from her back and pulled on her shoulder, turning her onto her back where he could look at her face.

She kept her eyes closed for a moment and then opened them to look up at him. They looked dark and enormous in her face, white and pinched with the memory of pain. Gideon lifted his hand to caress her cheekbone and watched as Deborah turned her head into his hand, leaning into his touch. Bending forward, he gently kissed her lips, then withdrew quickly to look at her again. "This isn't the first time, is it?" He asked.

She shook her head. "No, it's happened a couple of times before."

"Have you told Luke? Or are you being your usual stubborn, independent, pig-headed self and toughing it out?" Gideon stroked her cheek as he spoke.

Deborah laughed softly. "Guilty on all counts, and there's nothing Luke can do about it. I've read every book in the library on the subject and they all say this is normal. I'll just have to grit my teeth and put up with it. It won't be for much longer."

Gideon stared down at Deborah as she lay on her back beside him. She'd got dressed since he'd left the room and the black sleeveless dress she wore was crumpled underneath her. He reached out to smooth the material over her belly, thinking that it was unlikely that the baby would come soon enough for him to be there with her. In a couple of days he would have to leave, and given the short time they had together, he didn't want to waste any more of it on arguments.

"I'm sorry. I should have chosen my words more carefully earlier. What I said was stupid..." Deborah lifted her hand to touch her fingers to his mouth.

"I'm sorry, too. I don't want to fight with you, Matthew." He took her hand and kissed her fingers, then sat up on the bed.

"OK, no more fighting tonight. But you do need to eat. You missed dinner and the cook is going to be pissed if that tray doesn't go back empty in the morning." Gideon pulled the tray up the bed until it rested between them and started lifting the covers from the plates on it. He became aware that he was hungry himself. The light lunch had long since gone and he'd been too distracted to eat dinner.

As she watched him, Deborah asked, "How did you get in? I didn't unlock the door."

Gideon looked up from the tray and smiled. "Dureena."

Deborah laughed softly. "Of course. Having a thief on your crew must be very useful at times." He grinned and nodded. When he had all the plates uncovered, she started to laugh. "Am I supposed to eat all of this? I'll explode."

"I did try to tell your cook it was too much, but he insisted. I suppose I could help you out with some of it." Gideon reached for the pile of cookies on a small plate.

She slapped his hand away. "Hands off, buster, this is *my* dinner. I get first pick of what to eat. You get leftovers."

They picked at the food on the tray, Gideon gradually cajoling her into eating more than she really wanted. Deborah lay back in the pillows afterwards, resting while he played with her hair, which was spread out between them.

"You know what I'd really like now?" She struggled upright as she spoke. Gideon helped her to sit up. "I want a long soak in the tub. I haven't been able to do that for a while. My balance has been iffy and I haven't dared climb in and out. But if I had some help..."

Gideon grinned. "I think we could come to some sort of arrangement." He got up and moved around to her side of the bed. Swinging Deborah's legs off the side, he helped her to stand, then started on the buttons that ran down the front of her dress.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

{[Part 1: Past](#)} {[Part 2: Present](#)} {[Part 3: Present Perfect](#)} {[Part 4: Future](#)} {[Part 5: Conditional](#)}