

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn - Part 4: Future

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Will Max, Ilas and Dureena get their revenge?

Chapter 1

Angel stood at the top of the ramp and watched as Lucas disappeared, swallowed up by the darkness as he headed toward the castle. They had arrived just as the sun was setting, so had waited for night. When it was well after midnight, Lucas had told her that he was going to see if everything was safe for them before they made their presence known. She'd tried to tell him that wasn't necessary, but he'd paid no attention, he'd just told her to stay put and that he'd be back.

Angel turned and saw the pilot watching her closely. Something told her that Lucas had spoken to him about making sure she didn't follow, but she had to find a way to do just that, for two reasons. First, since their arrival, she'd been besieged by doubts about whether Gideon had believed her message. During the past few hours, those doubts had grown, especially when nothing had happened. If Gideon wasn't there, that meant there was no one to help her stop Lucas from kidnapping Demon. That thought alone had her bordering on panic. Angel knew that Lucas was going, not to check if it was safe for them, but to get Demon and bring her back to the ship. If Gideon wasn't waiting to capture Lucas, she had to do something herself to stop him. Second, she suspected that if Gideon was there, he was probably up at the castle, waiting with a trap set to catch Lucas. She had to be there, not to stop him from being caught, but if things escalated and Gideon tried to kill Lucas, maybe she could do something, shield him, whatever, to prevent that from happening.

She had to go after Lucas. Angel sensed a movement behind her and turned to see the Drazi standing behind her. She didn't hesitate; lifting her arm, she swung backwards with all her strength and elbowed him in the face, sending him crashing to the floor of the ship. His head hit the floor with a

sickening thump and he lay there unconscious. For a moment Angel stood over him, surprised that it had been that easy to knock him out, then she turned and ran down the ramp after Lucas.

Lucas stopped dead in his tracks and turned, narrowing his eyes. Someone was following him. He closed his eyes and let his mind feel who it was. "Sonofabitch," he cursed under his breath as he sensed her. Angel. He stood behind a tree and waited for her to get closer. He was going to have to once again teach her about following his orders. He knew now that he couldn't send her back. If he did, he'd run the risk of her alerting the entire planet to their presence.

Lucas cursed again. Having her along was going to make an already tricky task even more difficult. She wouldn't help him with Demon; that was for certain. He suddenly smiled, a new plan forming in his head. Maybe the situation wasn't so bad. There was little doubt that Whiplash would fight him tooth and nail, but she'd go willingly if he had a little insurance to encourage her--Angel. Demon wouldn't risk anything happening to her little sister. All he had to do was make it appear that he would kill her sister, and she wouldn't resist. [Angel-Face, you may have just done me a favor, after all.]

He moved further behind the tree as he heard her reach his hiding place. Then he stepped out and grabbed her.

Angel felt an arm coming around her waist and began to scream, but instantly a hand came over her mouth, stifling the scream. "What part of 'stay on the ship' did you not understand, darlin'?" She stopped struggling when she heard the familiar drawl whispering in her ear. Then she felt herself being turned around to face him. The night was dark and Angel could hardly see him, but her heart began hammering in fear as she made out Lucas' expression. But she couldn't afford to let that fear get to her. She quickly launched into her whispered explanation, praying silently that he believed her.

"I'm sorry, Lucas, I just couldn't stay behind. I know you wanted me to so you could check things out. But it would be better to have me along. If you run into a guard, he might capture you. Demon will have told them all about you, and how you look like Gideon. She's probably warned them to not take any chances. But if I'm with you, I can get us past any guards by telling them that you *are* Gideon and that you've brought me home. Then we can go to Demon, explain to her that she and my sisters have nothing to fear from you, and that all we want is to make a home for ourselves here, with them. With me along, I can help prevent a scene." Angel stopped and took in a breath while she watched him closely to see if he believed her. When he remained silent, she opened her mouth, ready to try and expand on her explanation, but she wasn't given a chance. Lucas held up his hand, cutting her off.

"Relax, darlin'--I agree," he said softly. Angel carefully hid her surprise. She honestly hadn't expected him to agree with her. Her coming along would upset his plans to kidnap Demon, so why wasn't he angry? Then it hit her. Lucas always had a back up plan, and whatever it was, she was now a part of it.

Lucas looked down at her. She'd told him that she could help prevent a scene. [Oh yes, darlin', you're going to be very helpful.] That was the only reason why he wasn't wringing her pretty neck for disobeying him. He reached for her hand and held it in his. He wanted to get the show on the road.

"Come on, darlin'. Let's go and say hello to your sisters." Angel could do nothing but nod and let him lead her toward the castle. Things were moving now and all she could do was go along. She increased her pace to keep up with Lucas' long strides as they drew closer to the castle gate.

As they reached the gate, Angel turned her head, straining her eyes to try to see into the darkness. Ever since leaving the ship, she'd had the feeling of being watched, and that feeling was even stronger now. Was it Gideon? If it was, why hadn't he captured Lucas yet? What was he waiting for?

Matheson watched through an infrared distance viewer as Lucas left the ship. He was shielding tightly and his troops were completely still in the grass behind him. As he watched Lucas walk toward the castle, he keyed his commlink to send the agreed signal to Gideon, then hand-signaled his guards to start moving. They'd rounded the hill and moved into the open when there was a flash of light and movement on the ramp of the ship. Matheson and the guards dropped flat instantly, trying to cover themselves in the long grass. Bringing the viewer back to his eyes, Matheson cursed silently as he watched Angel run up the hill after Lucas.

He wished he could send a telepathic message to Gideon, but couldn't while maintaining the screen around him and the guards. The energy field around the castle would have prevented him getting through, anyway. Instead, he brought his commlink to his mouth and keyed Gideon's call sign. The response was immediate and the volume low. "John?"

Matheson whispered, "Lucas is moving toward the castle and Angel has just left the ship and is following him." He heard Gideon cursing quietly at the other end of the commlink, then heard another voice speaking but couldn't make out the words. In a few seconds, Gideon came back on.

"We've got a problem. Deborah tells me that the screen Lily is projecting won't fool Angel. The minute she crosses the energy threshold, she'll detect all of us. If that happens, they'll just hightail it back to the ship. John, I want you to follow them up here. Leave five of your men to secure a perimeter around the ship, and bring the other four in behind Lucas and Angel to block their retreat. Shoot Lucas if you have to, but instruct your men not to fire at Angel. Got it?"

"Yes. On our way." Matheson crawled on his belly back to his team and gave whispered instructions, then led four of them in a low, silent run, closing the gap between themselves and Lucas and Angel.

Gideon turned to Demon as she stood on the battlements--Ilas on one side holding the screening equipment: Lily on the other, eyes closed. The three sisters held hands to increase the power of their link. He leaned forward and kissed her gently, then brought his hand up to caress her cheek. Demon couldn't return his touch, as her sisters held both of her hands, but she leaned into his caress, cherishing what might be his last touch.

He spoke quietly. "I'm going now. Stay put and let Alwyn take care of you, OK?" Demon saw him look at the Technomage standing beside her and her sisters. Alwyn nodded but didn't speak.

She watched as Gideon ran silently down the steps into the darkness. There were no lights in the courtyard and Demon couldn't see more than a few feet around them, but that meant no one could see them. The troops waiting below were totally concealed by the darkness and Lily's block. Now all they could do was wait.

[[No!]] Ilas' mental voice echoed in her brain. *[[I won't just wait here and let it all happen! I said I'd kill him and I will.]]* Demon shuddered as Ilas broke away from their link and dived at the guard standing

nearest to her. Before he could react, she'd snatched the PPG from his hand and was racing down the steps that Gideon had just descended. Demon wanted to go after her, but couldn't move. If she let go, the whole screen they had woven could fall apart, so she had to stay with Lily. She turned to Alwyn and begged in a whisper, "Please. Go after her. Stop her. Make sure she's safe!" Alwyn nodded and set off down the stairs in pursuit, soon disappearing into the dark. The courtyard plunged back into silence.

Lucas approached the gate warily, holding Angel tightly by the arm. He sensed that something wasn't right, but he couldn't pin down what was wrong. There seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary, there was nothing unexpected and no unusual sounds or lights, but nevertheless, he was uneasy. He'd accepted Angel's excuse for following him but felt that she wasn't telling him the whole truth. With hindsight, Lucas wished that he'd taken the time to raid her mind while having sex the previous night, but at the time, he'd been too involved with the pleasure she was giving him. It was too late now. Fear overlaid all of her thoughts and made anything else impossible to read.

He could see the bridge that crossed into the castle and the gateway looming above them in the darkness. For a moment, Lucas wished that this planet had a large, single moon to shine as brightly as the moon over Trinity always had--then he'd be able to see more. Instead, this planet had several small moons, none of which shone brightly enough to provide illumination.

Lucas paused on the bridge and stretched his senses, straining to pick up any signs of presence in the courtyard ahead. Nothing. He leaned into Angel's ear and whispered, "Not a sound now, darlin'," then pulled her with him across the bridge.

He walked slowly into the courtyard, but had gone no more than a few paces when he heard a noise from his right. Running footfalls echoed around the area enclosed by the walls, alerting Lucas to an approach. He stopped dead and pulled Angel close against his side, reaching into his back pocket for his switch-blade as he did so.

In the next instant, he was almost blinded as lights came on all around the courtyard, turning night into day. Through the lights, Lucas saw the shape-shifter running towards him, followed by an old man he recognized as another of those damned Technomages. [What the fuck is he doin' here?]

Lucas pulled Angel across the front of his body, placing her between him and the approaching couple and placed the knife to her neck. Angel started to struggle in his grip, so he whispered into her ear, "Don't worry, darlin'; this is just for show," and felt her struggles subside. [And if you believe that, then you ain't the sharpest pencil in the box, sweetheart.] The shape-shifter slid to a halt as she saw what he'd done and was immediately grabbed and pulled back by the Technomage. [Alwyn? Yeah, that's his name. And why in the hell can't I sense them even when I can see them?] Then he remembered Lily's ability to block and realized that he'd walked into a trap. There was no telling how many guards were concealed around the courtyard and he couldn't sense them to find out. Still in total silence, Lucas started to back towards the gate, holding Angel as a shield, when he heard a voice behind him.

"Far enough, Buck, or it'll be your turn to find out what a PPG blast feels like." Lucas spun around to see Matheson standing on the bridge, flanked by four tough-looking Brakiri guards, all pointing PPGs at them. He backed up a few steps into the courtyard and held Angel in front of him, the point of the knife pricking the skin of her neck. He watched as Matheson and the guards started moving toward them.

"I should have done a better job on you, teep. Next time I shoot you, I'll make sure you stay dead. But if I were you, I'd stop right there, unless you want to see Angel's throat cut." Lucas smiled in satisfaction as Matheson stopped and signaled his guards to do the same. He sneered at Matheson and spoke. "Well, if the Boy Wonder's here, then Batman can't be far away. Or given his taste for card games, is he the Joker in the pack? Your Batmobile ain't in orbit, so I guess you must have forgotten where you parked it." Lucas saw the confusion on Matheson's face and waited for the voice he knew he would hear; the voice so like his own.

"Let her go, Lucas. You're not going anywhere. You can't kill her, or you'd lose your hostage." Lucas turned his head and looked at Gideon, standing in the middle of the courtyard, backed up by a dozen guards, all with PPGs that were pointed at him. [Well, this is getting interesting.] His mind was racing, looking for options and ways out of the mess. His thinking wasn't helped by the rage that was surging through him. He had to hold himself back from slitting Angel's throat. Lucas suspected that she'd betrayed him; how else could they have known he was coming? She was still unmoving in his grasp and he could feel her fear as the point of the knife pricked her, but she seemed to still think he was pretending to hold her hostage, not realizing that he was now deadly serious.

"I don't have to kill her, Batman, just cut her up a bit. Do you think her sister would like one of her ears as a souvenir? Or maybe an eye? Back up and call off the dogs, or I start some surgery on her, and it won't be cosmetic." Lucas felt Angel struggle in his arms and squeezed her tightly, whispering into her ear, "Easy, darlin' Everything is gonna be fine." Her struggles subsided.

He smiled in satisfaction as Gideon lowered his PPG. Lucas cast a quick glance back at Matheson and saw that he also had his weapon down by his side. In the background, the old Technomage was holding the shape-shifter back. She was struggling against him, but he was gradually dragging her back toward the stairs. And descending those stairs was the very thing Lucas wanted: Demon. She and Lily were holding hands as they reached the bottom of the steps. They both looked as if they could drop their babies at any moment.

"I'll make you a deal, Batman. Do you want to deal? I'll give you Angel, and I won't cut her, but I want something in exchange."

Lucas saw Gideon's skeptical expression as he asked, "So what's the deal, Lucas? What do you have in mind? It had better be good. We can wait as long as we have to. Your arm will get tired eventually, and when that happens, you're dead." Gideon's smile was malicious and just for a moment, Lucas was almost proud to have him for a descendant.

Lucas matched the smile and raised him a sneer. "This is Lucas Buck you're talkin' to. The only deals I do are good ones." [For me anyway,] he thought. He watched as Demon and Lily drew close to Gideon's side and nodded his head towards Demon. "I'll swap you. One sister for another. I'll take Whiplash in exchange for Angel. Shouldn't matter to you, Batman, you've fucked them both. You know they're as good as each other."

Lucas felt Angel go rigid in his arms and then she started to scream. "Damn you, Lucas! NO! I won't let you! I won't let you hurt her!" Her struggles grew wilder and he pulled her tightly against him, trapping her arms against her body and pushing the knife up in front of her right eye.

"Keep still, Angel, or I'll start with your pretty blue eyes and work down from there." All his rage was projected into his words as he hissed them into her ear. She went rigid again as he moved the knife less than a centimeter from her right eye.

His attention was locked on Gideon in front of him and Matheson to one side, waiting for their response. Demon started to move forward, exactly as Lucas had expected. [Sisterly love--she'll sacrifice herself to save her sister.] But then Gideon saw her moving and grabbed her arm, pulling her back. At the same moment, Matheson moved and grabbed Lily, holding her tightly. All four sisters were now effectively immobilized, but the screen they had created was still in place. Lucas still couldn't sense a damned thing around him.

Demon listened as Matthew spoke to her, holding her. "No! You can't do this. He'll kill you and God knows what he'll do to our son. I know that you love Angel, but don't give up your own life *and* our son's to save her."

Demon was being torn apart by the conflicting demands being made on her. She could see Angel held rigidly in Lucas's arms, staring at the point of the knife being held rock steady in front of her eye. Demon *had* to save Angel; she knew that Lucas wasn't bluffing and that he'd dissect Angel in front of them before he'd surrender. She couldn't let that happen. She couldn't understand why Angel wasn't using her power to break free. Was Lucas able to inhibit Angel in some way? And why had he used her as a hostage from the start? They'd expected him to get her to freeze them in their tracks, but she hadn't even tried. Did this mean that Angel was finally breaking free of him? Her words seemed to indicate that. But if Angel was no longer Lucas's ally, she was his enemy and in mortal danger from him. Demon had to do something to save her sister, but she couldn't give her son to Lucas. The bond that had developed between her and the baby over the previous months had grown to the point where it rivaled the link with her sisters. She simply couldn't give him up.

Angel was screaming at her. "No, Demon! No, you can't do this. Stay with Gideon. Don't do it. He'll hurt you, and I can't let him hurt you." She was struggling again, holding her head as far back from the knife as she could get it.

Demon strained against Matthew's grasp for a moment, then slumped, looking at Angel, tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry, Angel, but I can't. I want to--I really want to, but I can't let him have my baby."

She collapsed back against Matthew, letting him support her as she watched Angel struggle against Lucas' grip. What made it more difficult to bear was seeing Lucas again. He looked so much like Matthew that it was almost as if Matthew were holding Angel and threatening her. It confused and hurt Demon to see what appeared to be the man she loved hurting and threatening her sister. A pain started in her head and in her belly, making it hard for her to think.

She couldn't stand by and watch any more. Demon had pulled herself upright and out of Matthew's grasp, moving forward again, when she saw movement behind Lucas and Angel.

Dureena's knife spun through the air so fast it appeared as a blur across her field of vision. It disappeared behind Lucas and she heard the 'thud' of it striking the middle of his back. Lucas staggered forward, pushing Angel away from him, and dropping the switch-blade from his hand as he clawed at his back, trying to get to the knife between his ribs.

Demon let go of Lily's hand and caught Angel as she nearly fell, propelled by Lucas's push. She tried to hold Angel back, but hearing Lucas's grunt of pain, Angel spun round and screamed as she saw Lucas drop to his knees, still trying to reach the knife sticking out from his back.

Angel was screaming his name. "Lucas! Oh no! Lucas, it wasn't supposed to be like this. I didn't want

them to hurt you, just to stop you. Please, Lucas! I love you. Don't be angry. I couldn't let you take her, but you're not supposed to be hurt, either. I came to stop them from hurting you. Lucas, please forgive me! Lucas, please..." her voice babbled on as she rushed back to him and fell to her knees by his side, putting her hands against his shoulders to support him as he slumped forward. Angel was screaming his name over and over as she tried to hold him up, but his weight was bearing down on her, pressing her to the ground.

Demon ran to help her sister and joined her, kneeling by Lucas' side, pushing her arms under his chest, keeping him from falling flat on the ground. Between them they supported him as the last strength from his legs left him and he fell forward, turning his head into Demon's shoulder as he fell.

She looked down at the man pressed against her and saw Matthew's face, blood now seeping from the side of his mouth. She looked in horror as the face of the man she loved clenched in pain. Angel was still screaming as Gideon surged forward and grabbed her by the shoulders, pulling her roughly away, yanking her to her feet and almost throwing her at the guards who stood by his side. Demon could hear him yelling at them to take Angel to a cell and keep her there, and she knew that she should intervene, should stop him, but she couldn't move. Her head hurt and the pain in her belly was getting worse all the time. Demon heard Angel's screams diminish as she was lifted out of the courtyard, struggling all the way but held aloft by four guards, one at each hand and foot.

Lucas now lay in her arms, his head on her shoulder. Demon could see the knife standing out from his back and went to touch it, then quickly withdrew her hand. She knew that if she tried to pull it out, she'd kill him. She could feel his labored breathing and the blood from his mouth was seeping into the front of her dress. Lucas looked up into her eyes and his mouth moved into a pained smile. "Hello, Whiplash. This isn't quite the reunion I had planned." He coughed and more blood came from his mouth. Demon held him tighter, totally confused as to who she was holding. She could hear a voice that sounded like Matthew shouting at her, but she knew that it couldn't be Matthew; he was lying in her arms, bleeding to death.

The voice kept calling her name, but Demon blocked it out as she looked down at the man in her arms. "Don't die. Please don't die." She whispered the words as she stroked his hair.

He coughed again and a goblet of bright red blood fell from his lips onto her breast. "Not planning on it, darlin', but if the body dies, the spirit moves on." Demon watched as he brought his hand up to rest on her swollen belly. The voice that was yelling at her wouldn't go away and eventually she looked up. Her confusion grew as she saw Matthew kneeling beside her, trying to pull the man in her arms away from her. She looked back down and shook her head, trying to clear the confusion that fuddled her.

Looking back up at Matthew she finally grasped the meaning of his words. "Let him go, Deborah. Let him go. I've called Luke and Sarah, and they're on their way. Now get away from him."

Demon looked back down at Lucas and struggled to grasp the meaning of what was happening. [Why can't I think straight? What's the matter with me?] A sudden increase in the pain in her belly helped clear the confusion. The hand that rested there had clenched tight, digging into her, hurting her, and the pain went beyond her belly, piercing her mind. She started to scream. "No! Stop it! You can't, you mustn't..." and tried to push the man lying on her chest away from her, but somehow he was holding onto her, keeping the physical contact that he was using to drive his mind in between her and her baby. Demon could feel the link with her child being strained and pulled as the new mind intruded. And the baby was reacting, kicking strongly inside her in protest at the mental pain he was suffering.

She felt the man being lifted away from her and looked up to see that Luke and Sarah had arrived and

were helping Matthew to lift him off her. His hand stayed grasping her belly until she pried his fingers away from her, then she doubled up around the pain he left there. Demon laid on her side watching as he was placed face down on a stretcher, his head still turned towards her. She felt Matthew's arms reach around her and pull her up close to him, pulling her back until she lay against him, his arms wrapped tightly around her. But she was unable to break away from the eyes of the man on the stretcher, and she could still feel him in her head, twisting and tearing at the link with her child.

His gaze was finally broken as Luke stepped between them and knelt by the side of the stretcher, scanning the wound in Lucas' back with one of the instruments from the infirmary. Demon heard Lucas laugh softly as he caught sight of the person treating him. "Well, Harvard, looks like someone did the job for you this time." The presence in her head started to fade as she watched him slip into unconsciousness, and her confusion faded with it.

She turned her head into Matthew's shoulder as he held her and she started to weep. Demon could feel his hand stroking her hair, trying to comfort her, when an overwhelming wave of pain ran through her belly and back and she doubled up again, unable to stop herself from screaming. The pain went on and on, a clenching, stabbing sensation that grabbed her guts and twisted. Her legs cramped and she felt nauseous. She could hear Matthew calling after Luke, yelling at him to come back, but all she was conscious of, was the pool of liquid spreading out beneath her, soaking her dress and the ground.

Max ran into the courtyard, hard on the heels of Luke and Sarah. When the call had come in on Sarah's commlink, all that was clear was that Lucas was down and injured. He had no idea whether anyone else had been hurt and wasn't going to hang around the infirmary, waiting to find out if Dureena and Ilas were safe.

The first thing he saw was Alwyn holding Ilas tightly against him, but he couldn't tell if he was restraining her or comforting her. Whichever, Ilas seemed to be in distress. Max raced to her and took her from the Technomage's arms. The old man nodded in satisfaction and said, "About time. I'm needed over there," and left at a trot to join the group in the center of the yard. Max stood, holding Ilas close to his chest as he watched Luke and Sarah get Lucas onto the stretcher and Demon collapse back against Gideon.

Ilas was weeping softly into his chest and he pulled her head up to look at him. "What's the matter? Why are you crying?"

Her lavender eyes were overflowing as she spoke. "It's my fault, Max. Demon is in such pain and it's all my fault."

Max looked over at Gideon and Demon. Luke had now returned and was examining her. He stroked Ilas's hair. "Well I don't think you can claim responsibility this time. She's in labor and I rather think that the Captain is the one who got her pregnant."

He felt a presence at his elbow and turned to see Dureena standing beside him, a vicious smile spread across her features. "I did it, Max. I got him. I got the bastard who killed our child." The smile vanished as a look of bewilderment crossed her face. "But I don't understand why he isn't dead. The knife went straight into his heart--I saw it. He should have died instantly."

Max frowned at her. "Where did you aim, Dureena?"

She looked up at him, surprised. "At his heart, of course. Just to the right of center of his chest."

Max nodded. "Thought as much. That may be where the Zanderi have their hearts, but humans keep theirs on the left side. You missed his heart, Dureena. I guess you pierced a lung, though. If we're lucky, he could still die."

Dureena let out a growl of frustration and started to turn away from Max and Ilas. Max grabbed her arm. "Leave it. They've captured the ones responsible and Gideon will make sure they're charged. Let's take care of Ilas now, OK?"

Dureena looked down at Ilas, still weeping in Max's arms, appearing to notice her for the first time. She took a deep breath and subsided. "All right. Captain will do what's right. Let's go to our rooms."

Ilas resisted for a moment. "No, I want to go with Demon. She's in pain!"

Max held her tightly. "There's nothing you can do right now. Gideon and Luke are with her. Let's get some rest, and then we'll be fresh if we're needed later."

Ilas reluctantly let herself be led from the courtyard and back to her rooms, looking back over her shoulder at her sisters as she went.

Gideon knelt on the ground, holding Deborah close to him, supporting her back against his chest as she pulled her knees up as far as her belly would let her and groaned in pain. He could hear Luke's footsteps pounding across the courtyard toward them, then felt a hand on his shoulder. Looking up, he saw John standing next to him, his arm still around Lily, asking, "What can we do?" Lily knelt by Gideon's side and took Deborah's hand, stroking it gently, whispering to her as she rocked in pain. Luke arrived at the same moment and began to examine Deborah as she laid against him.

Gideon sighed in relief. He could get John to take care of everything while he concentrated on whatever was the matter with Deborah. "Send some of the guards up to the infirmary. I don't like the idea of Sarah being up there on her own with Lucas, even if he is unconscious. Have a couple more guards posted outside Angel's cell, then get back to the ship and secure it." He watched as John nodded and trotted over to Nikarran, passed on the instructions then turned, collected a group of guards, and made his way out of the courtyard. Nikarran left with another small group of guards. Max then stood with Ilas and Dureena on the far side of the open space, watching, but keeping out of the melee.

Gideon was now free to give all of his attention to Deborah, who had stopped groaning but was now panting for air, sweat standing out on her face, plastering her hair to her forehead. He watched in horror as the pool of liquid grew under her and he almost screamed at Luke. "What is it? Is she bleeding? For God's sake, tell me what's going on!"

Luke looked up at him, his face grim. "Her water has broken. She's in labor. Had she had any pains earlier?" Gideon nodded and described the previous night's events. Luke swore. "Like hell, it was false labor. She's probably been in first-stage labor for the past twenty-four hours. I need to get her up to the infirmary. I think she's going into the second stage and the baby could be born within the next couple of hours." Luke turned and called for the remaining guards to bring another stretcher.

Gideon kept rocking Deborah gently and kissed her forehead. Her breathing had settled a little and she opened her eyes and whispered. "Sorry."

He moved his hand to wipe some of the sweat from her face and laughed softly. "What are you apologizing for this time? Did you plan to go into labor right now? At least this way, I get to be with you." Gideon clamped down on all the anxiety he felt about it being too early, deciding to wait until he could get a moment alone with Luke to ask how much of a problem that was going to be.

The stretcher arrived and he helped Luke lift her on to it, then walked alongside as the guards carried it, holding Deborah's hand tightly as they crossed the courtyard. Lily walked on the other side, her hand on Deborah's shoulder. Gideon became aware that Alwyn was following closely and that Max, Ilas, and Dureena had disappeared.

Lily groaned suddenly and doubled over, dropping to her knees. Luke was instantly by her side, holding her anxiously, asking her where the pain was.

Gideon looked down at the stretcher and saw Deborah reach out with her free hand towards Lily. Her voice was cracked as she spoke. "I'm sorry, Lily! Oh, God, I'm sorry." Tears were streaming down her face as she looked at her sister kneeling on the ground. The guards had stopped when Luke had and Gideon squatted by the side of the stretcher.

"What is it? What's the matter with her? Why are you sorry?" He stroked her cheek to drag her attention away from Lily.

Deborah turned and looked at him, her eyes enormous. "My fault, all my fault. The link, she felt my pain through the link and it's started her, too. And it may be too soon for her--the babies are so small. My fault. Everything's my fault. Where's Angel? I want Angel. What have you done with her? Have you hurt her? Did he hurt her? My fault, my fault..." her voice faded into a whisper as she turned her head away from him.

Gideon didn't know what to do. Deborah seemed confused and anxious and he hadn't a clue what to do with her. He started as a hand dropped on his shoulder, then looked up to see Alwyn standing behind him. "Don't worry, Captain. This isn't unusual; many women become anxious and irritable towards the end of first stage labor, and if she *is* in that stage, we can expect another contraction any time now."

As if in response to his words, Deborah moaned again and drew her legs up towards her chest. Gideon yelled. "Luke! It's starting again! Get back here, will you?" He leaned over the stretcher to look at Luke and Lily on the other side. Lily was on her side on the ground, moaning in pain, her legs drawn up in front of her. Luke looked up anxiously at Gideon's call, then down at Lily again, obviously torn.

"Matthew, I can't leave her! Lily's birth is going to be more complicated than Demon's. I have to stay with her. I'll get one of the guards to run and get the village midwife to help you, but you're going to have to take care of Demon yourself."

Gideon came closer to fainting at that moment than he'd ever done in his life. He wouldn't have thought himself capable of making the noise that emerged when he spoke. "ME?" It was a high-pitched squeak, a noise he'd only ever heard a bat make before now.

Raven laughed at him. "Don't panic! I know that Alwyn has had some medical training, I'm sure he can help."

Gideon looked up at the old Technomage, who was grinning like a Cheshire cat. "Don't worry, Captain.

I can help. I told you I was a competent midwife. It looks like I'm going to get the chance to prove it." He put his hand under Gideon's arm and pulled him to his feet. "Now, let's get this young lady to the infirmary and see just how far along she is, shall we? Or do you want her to give birth here in the middle of the courtyard?" Gideon staggered alongside the stretcher, looking back to see Luke lifting Lily into his arms and following them into the castle.

Luke held Lily gently, following the stretcher on which Demon was being carried. He felt completely torn as to where his duty lay. As a doctor, he would never normally treat someone with whom he was intimate, or even his own family, but with Sarah tied up with Lucas, there wasn't anyone else who he trusted to be with Lily. The complications that could arise with her being so small, the babies being large and there being two of them, were too great for him to be willing to leave her to a midwife. She would need a doctor. And how much longer would John be? Carrying Lily as he was, he couldn't reach the commlink on his wrist to call him. That would have to wait until they reached the infirmary.

He was angry with Demon and worried about her at the same time. Angry with her for not telling him about the pains she had experienced. But realistically, would he have disagreed with her self-diagnosis of false labor? Probably not. It was only her water breaking that made it apparent that her contractions were the real thing. Worried because her baby might already be big enough to cause her problems, Luke hadn't yet told her that she would probably need a cesarean, and he hoped that by her having the child so early, it wouldn't be necessary. He decided that as soon as he could get Lily settled, he'd have to find the time for a quick check on Demon, just to be sure that he wouldn't need to operate.

As Luke approached the infirmary he could see Nikarran waiting there, having gone on ahead with the guards for Sarah and Lucas. He called over to him. "Nikarran? Can you send one of your men down to the village to get Kirrin? We're going to need all the help we can get here tonight." Nikarran nodded and left quickly.

Luke looked down at Lily, who lay quietly in his arms, her head turned into his shoulder. "Everything's going to be fine, Lily. John will be here soon. Just keep breathing deeply and don't do anything unless I tell you. I'm going to take care of our Fire-Lily and our babies."

She looked up at him with those incredible green eyes that even now made his knees weak and whispered, "I know you will. As long as you and John are here, I know that everything will be all right." Lily lifted her arm round his neck and held herself tightly against him. "But what about Demon? Who's going to look after her?"

Luke kissed her forehead. "Don't worry. Demon will be fine. Gideon and Alwyn are with her, and I've sent for Kirrin. They're in one of the side rooms. Demon is strong and having the baby early will make it easier for her. So stop worrying about your sisters and let John and me look after you. All right?"

Lily leaned her head against his chest and sighed. "I love you, Sad-Eyes, and I can't wait to hold your daughter in my arms."

They'd arrived in the side room where Luke had decided to put Lily, where she could have some privacy, and he laid her carefully on the bed before he smiled down at her. "And if she's half as beautiful as her mother, then I can't wait to see her." He straightened up and keyed John's call sign on his commlink.

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

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