

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

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Lily, John and Luke in the infirmary by Lilita.

Chapter 3

"Nikarran?" Gideon stuck his head round the door of the Guard Captain's office, expecting to find him

there. He was somewhat taken aback to find the office empty, since he couldn't remember another time when Nikarran hadn't been there. He'd sometimes thought that the Brakiri lived in there, and didn't seem to bother to ever go back to his home and family in the village.

Gideon looked in the key cupboard on the wall and found the bunch of keys that Nikarran kept there, which were used to lock the cell doors. He didn't need Nikarran's help to find the cell in which Angel was being kept. It should be the only one occupied.

Gideon wasn't looking forward to his meeting with Angel, but wanted to get it over with before Deborah awoke. While she was convinced that Angel was an innocent victim of Lucas' manipulation, Gideon wanted to talk to her himself before he was willing to accept that, but seeing Angel again would be difficult. So many bad memories and guilty feelings were associated with her that he knew he was going to find it hard to be fair to her, but he was determined to make the effort, for Deborah's sake--and for Angel's. He owed Angel that much.

He stuffed the keys into his jacket pocket and walked the length of the corridor leading from Nikarran's office, looking for a closed door, wondering what had happened to the guards he'd ordered to be posted outside Angel's cell. By the time Gideon reached the end of the corridor and found every door open, he was becoming concerned. [Where the hell have they put her, and where is everybody?] he wondered as he walked back, carefully looking into each room as he went.

Gideon found a cell where the blanket on the bed was rumpled and a tray was on the mattress. Then he heard footsteps in the hallway outside. He turned, and looking out, saw one of the Brakiri guards he'd trained earlier, walking toward him. [What was his name? Oh, yes.] "Venkar? Have you seen Nikarran?" The Brakiri looked startled and… afraid? He shook his head, but didn't speak. Gideon tried again. "Which cell was Angel put in? I need to talk to her." The guard pointed to the cell where Gideon was standing. "This one?" Venkar nodded. "Then where the hell is she?"

Gideon watched as Venkar turned and fled back along the corridor, disappearing around the corner at the end. He turned back into the cell and looked around again, his suspicions and temper rising with every moment. A flash of white on the floor caught his attention and he stooped to pick up the single sheet of paper that was half under the bed. Gideon read it slowly, feeling himself losing control with every word. When he reached the end, he screwed the letter into a tight ball and threw it at the wall. Grabbing the tray from the bed, he launched it across the cell to hit the far wall with a satisfying crash, as the glass and plate smashed into pieces. He was breathing hard and his fists were clenched tight as he spoke through gritted teeth.

"You couldn't trust me, could you? You had to do it your way." He took a deep breath and picked up the ball of paper from the floor, then spun on his heel and ran from the cell, his face a mask of anger.

Luke was startled when Lily suddenly stood in front of him and said, "I need to go see how Demon is doing. I can't reach her."

He looked up at her, seeing the determination and concern in her eyes. He had just been scanning the medical journals for any hints on exceptionally high early labor pain, since he didn't have any other databases available for research. Shortly after Lily had left the bath, her contractions had become much less painful than they had been at the start. Luke didn't quite accept that this could be the effect of the warm water, but when she had asked him if he had a better explanation, he had to admit that he didn't.

Despite Lily's labor being back to normal, he shook his head as he got up and laid his hands on her shoulders. "I don't think that would be wise. I'm sure everything is all right, or else Alwyn would have sent Kirrin to get me. Demon has probably already had her son. And if something is wrong, I don't want you upset." Before Lily's temper could flare, Luke continued, "But I understand your concern, so I'll go have a look. You stay here with John."

Luke could tell that Lily was restless and wanted to go herself, but he didn't want her wandering around the castle, even if Demon was in a room just across the main infirmary. The pain Lily experienced during her contractions may be back to a normal level now, but that didn't necessarily mean everything was normal. Knowing her, she would probably just run off at the first opportunity if he refused her, so he had to offer an alternative. At the same time, he was showing her that he was willing to trust her instincts enough that he'd leave her in medically unqualified company for a short while. Luke looked at her firmly, letting her know that he wouldn't change his mind.

Finally, Lily sighed. She wasn't particularly thrilled by his streak of over-protectiveness, but knew that at the same time it was part of what made her love him. "All right, but promise me if something is wrong, you'll tell me the truth!"

Luke looked into her amazing green eyes, sparkling with determination, once again marveling at her inner strength. [It's a miracle that I manage to deny her anything, at least once in a while.] He smiled. "I promise."

Lily smiled back at him and drew him into a quick, tight embrace. "Thank you," she murmured against his chest, then stood back and turned him around, pushing him toward the door. "And be quick. You know that patience isn't my strong point!"

John chuckled.

Raven left the side room where Lily was in labor and was surprised to find Gideon sitting alone in the main infirmary. The Captain's head was down, and he was looking at a piece of paper he held in his hands, with his elbows propped on his knees as he sat forward in the chair.

Gideon looked up as Raven came out of the side room and asked, "How's Lily? Has she had her babies yet?"

Raven shook his head. "Not yet. Twins are often faster than singles, but she's still in the first stage, so we've got a way to go yet, but mother and babies are fine. Thanks for asking. She wants to know how Demon is." He looked quizzically at Gideon. "Is everything all right? Why are you sitting out here? Where's Alwyn?"

Gideon pointed toward the operating room. "In there, helping Sarah. Deborah had the baby about an hour ago." His face was expressionless and his voice flat.

Raven was becoming concerned. He pulled a chair up and sat opposite Gideon. "So why aren't you in there with Demon and your son?"

Gideon took a deep breath and looked at Raven, his eyes narrowing. "Because if I see her right now, I think I'll break her neck."

Raven laughed, then stopped abruptly when he saw that Gideon wasn't joking. "Why? What's happened?"

Without saying a word, Gideon stretched out his right hand and offered the piece of paper he'd been studying.

Raven read the letter slowly, swallowing hard when he got to the end, then went back and reread it, and passed it back to Gideon. "I suppose we should have seen this coming." Gideon nodded but didn't speak. Raven looked at him intently before continuing. "So are you going to break Lily's neck, too?"

Gideon's mouth twisted into a bitter smile. "No. I think we know who the ring leader is, don't we?" He nodded his head toward the room that Demon occupied.

"Don't give her all the credit. This looks like a joint effort to me. I wonder how Ilas plans to tell Dureena that they arranged for Angel to escape."

Gideon's eyebrows rose at that comment. "I hadn't thought of that. I was just trying to figure out how to tell Dureena myself, but you're right. Maybe I'll let Ilas do it. Poetic justice." His head went back down as he studied the letter, which he then folded and shoved into his jacket pocket.

Raven leaned forward. "So what do you plan to do about it? I assume that you've decided against the neck-breaking bit."

Gideon nodded. "Tempting though it is. What most of me wants to do is to call Galen--I know he won't be far away--and get him to take me straight back to the Excalibur. Then I'll do my best to forget that this planet and all of its inhabitants exist."

"So what's stopping you?" Raven was determined to get Gideon to talk it through, let him air his anger and frustration, before attempting some form of reconciliation with Demon. Under the circumstances, Luke had no idea how he was going to achieve it, but he was hoping that if he kept Gideon talking long enough, something would occur to him.

Gideon sighed, "Two things. One of them is in there." He pointed to the operating room. "I can't leave until I can take him with me. I won't leave the rest of you to deal with Lucas. Even in his current condition he's damned dangerous."

"And the other thing?"

Gideon nodded towards the door of the room where Demon lay. Raven frowned and asked, "Your son? Or his mother?"

Gideon laughed softly. "Still haven't gotten used to the fact that they're separate. So make that three things."

Raven sighed. "Matt, you know how committed Demon is to her sisters. What did you expect? Did you really think that she was just going to let you arrest Angel, then have her charged and mind-wiped? Didn't you talk to her about it?"

Gideon shook his head. "I tried. She locked me out of the bedroom. Now you know why I came to dinner alone the other night. She wouldn't listen to me. She wouldn't trust me. She just went ahead

and did her own thing, regardless of the consequences." He was on his feet, pacing, as he spoke.

Raven spoke quietly. "Demon isn't stupid, she'll have worked out the possible consequences." He paused for a moment, thinking, then looked up at Gideon. "Tell me something. Did she ever try to persuade you to break your promise to Dureena?"

Gideon stopped pacing and looked down intently at Raven. "No. She just told me that she couldn't let me keep it."

Raven looked up at him and smiled sadly. "You know, you two really are a perfect match. You both try to take responsibility for everything, and then you both feel guilty as hell about it. Rather than try to get you to break your promise, and let you take responsibility, Demon took it on herself, so you could just be angry, and not have to feel guilty." He could see that he had Gideon's attention, so continued.

"Have you really read that letter? It's heartbreaking. You have no idea how much she's missed you and Angel. She's been covering up in every message she's sent to you, but it's been hell to watch her these past few months. Demon has been consumed by pain and grief, but she just risked making that permanent in order to save her sister. I don't know where she got the courage to do that, but I do understand why Lily has been so worried about her."

Raven could tell that Gideon was thinking about what he'd said, but he watched as the Captain's lips tightened and then he shook his head. "I don't know, Luke. It still feels like a betrayal. She could have talked to me, she could have tried harder--damn it, she could have done almost anything else, but to go behind my back…" he trailed off into silence, brooding.

Raven made one more try. "I understand all that, but I've one last question for you. If you'd been in her place and it had been John sitting in that cell, at risk of being mind-wiped for a crime that you knew he hadn't committed, what would you have done? Would you have waited and trusted someone to help him? Or would you have taken matters into your own hands and got him out of there?" Raven watched as Gideon frowned, obviously considering what Luke had said. Raven stood and gripped Gideon's arm. "Please, try to find a way to forgive her."

Gideon listened to what Luke was saying and tried to look at things from his and Deborah's point of view. It hadn't occurred to him that part of her motive for taking things out of his hands was to free him from the responsibility of delivering on his promise. Looked at in that light, he could see that what Luke was saying about her bravery made sense. Gideon also knew that he would never have left John in the position Angel had been in.

He thought back to the previous afternoon when they'd made love and Deborah had asked him to remember that she loved him. Her odd behavior was now explained. She'd known what she had planned and had also known that he might leave her as a result. She must have been desperate for one last moment of affection.

Gideon looked at Luke. "I think I'll go and talk to her about it."

He left Raven standing in the middle of the infirmary as he walked to the door of Deborah's room and opened it. Kirrin looked up from the chair by the bed and smiled as he entered. She stood and walked to the end of the bed, picking the sleeping baby up from the crib and offering him to Gideon. "You haven't

held you son yet. Would you like to?"

"In a minute." Gideon reached inside his jacket and pulled out the teddy bear, placing it in the crib. He let the Brakiri nurse show him how to hold the baby and how to support his head, then went to sit with him by the side of Deborah's bed, waiting for her to wake up.

John Matheson didn't feel like laughing anymore. "Lily! Be reasonable. Luke promised he'd tell you how they are. Maybe he's just taking the opportunity to check up on the baby." He stood behind Lily, his arms wrapped around her in a gentle but restraining embrace, his face next to hers as he tried to soothe her. She had become increasingly anxious after five minutes had passed without Luke coming back. John had to restrain her physically, which wasn't that easy. Despite her size--[And even in labor!]-the tiny redhead was quite a handful. [She's worried half to death, but there's something going on here that involves more than Demon and the baby...]

Lily was still struggling. "No! Something isn't right, I can feel it! I..."

At that moment the door opened and Luke came in. Lily immediately rushed up to him when John let her go. "Is Demon all right? And her baby?" She stopped dead in her tracks and frowned. "What is it, Luke? Why are you looking at me like that? Are they...?"

Luke shook his head. "They're all right. Demon had her baby about an hour ago." He studied Lily's face as her features relaxed, but some apprehension remained. Then he shook his head slowly and gave her a wry grin. "If you'd told me what you had planned maybe you wouldn't have had to give away all your jewelry."

He could see the blood drain from Lily's face as she took a step back and bumped into John, who had walked up behind her and now looked at Luke questioningly, his hands instinctively rising to hold Lily's shoulders.

"Are... is Gideon...?" she whispered, biting her lips and hugging herself as she waited for his answer.

"I think I just managed to talk him out of leaving, or doing some other equally stupid thing, but it was close."

Lily collapsed into John's arms, crying with relief.

"What are you talking about?" John asked, frowning at Luke as he comforted Lily.

Luke looked into his eyes. "Demon, Ilas and Lily had a little conspiracy going, one in which they planned to free Angel with Nikarran's help--and they succeeded."

John's eyes widened. Now everything fell into place: the looks Lily and Ilas had given Gideon and Demon, Lily's strange behavior after their 'war council' on Demon's terrace, and the shuttle he'd heard leaving when Lily had been taking her bath earlier.

Luke went on to tell him about finding Gideon sitting in the main infirmary, the letter, and how he'd finally been able to convince him to stay. "I hope it'll all work out. He's in with Demon now."

Lily had been quietly sobbing against John's chest all the time, but now straightened and shook off

John's arms, looking up at Luke with a sad smile on her face. "You don't know how much this means to me, Luke. If Matthew had left, it would have killed Demon." She whispered her last words. Luke's heart went out to her as Lily finally let him see all the pain and fear she'd kept inside over the past day.

He shook his head and closed the distance between them to put his arms around her, softly pulling her head against his chest and stroking her red locks. "Yes, I do know," he whispered back.

John wrapped his arms around her from the other side. "Why didn't you tell me, Lily? I know Matthew, I might have been able to do something to help."

Lily looked up at him, wide-eyed. "I told you why. I didn't want you to get caught in the middle of this!"

John nodded, again remembering her strange behavior. He had to admit that while what they had done was unlawful, he admired the inventiveness and courage of the sisters. They had risked the wrath of the men they loved for their sister's sake, but they had nonetheless done what they thought had to be done. John knew that what Luke had told Gideon was true--his Captain would have done the same had he been in Angel's position, and vice versa.

He realized that Lily was still looking up at him with worry in her eyes. He cupped her cheek with his left hand and said, "You crazy witches," grinning. John softly touched her mind to let her know that he wasn't angry, and Luke's arms tightened around her reassuringly.

A smile slowly spread on Lily's face, then turned into a laugh as she pulled first John, then Luke, down into a fierce kiss.

Both men hugged her between them, and she held on tightly, knowing she would never let go of them.

Suddenly Luke's head jerked up. "I'm such an idiot!" He looked down at Lily wide-eyed, his brain working furiously.

"Well there's no need to state the obvious." John murmured, an innocent expression on his face.

"I should have realized," Luke's voice trailed off as John's words sunk in, and he gave him a mock angry look, then broke into a grin and shook his head, getting two grins in return. He let his eyes rest on Lily again and continued, "what caused your extraordinarily painful contractions early on. Demon's labor triggered yours, right?"

Lily nodded, her eyes going wide as she realized where his train of thought led. "So you think...?"

Luke nodded. "Demon's contractions intensified yours. Once her baby was born, you were back to normal again."

Lily shook her head. "Well, if that makes you an idiot, then how big an idiot does it make me?" Suddenly she drew in her breath as something occurred to her. "Ilas! What about her?" She wanted to contact her sister, but at that moment another contraction started, disrupting the link. She quickly held on to Luke, letting herself hang on his neck slightly, and concentrated on breathing deep. "Can't send..." she murmured.

Luke cocked his head. "Because of the contraction?"

Lily nodded.

"I'm sure Max and Dureena would have brought her here if she'd gone into labor, or they'd have at least contacted us," Luke offered. "Maybe Ilas isn't affected by it."

John was curious. "What makes you think that?" He was gently rubbing Lily's lower back.

Luke explained. "For one, she told us during our first stay that she wasn't as attuned to the fine vibrations in their link as her sisters, which may result from her being the only non-human. Furthermore, it seems sending isn't possible for Lily during contractions, so we can assume the link is disrupted. which begs the question: how did Demon's labor trigger Lily's, then?"

John frowned. "Because they're both four weeks to term, and Ilas still has a few months to go?"

Luke nodded. "Could be. Both are human and more finely attuned to the link than Ilas, and the other two were close, even touching at times, when Demon went into labor."

"We use touch to link and reinforce our abilities," Lily's voice emerged, muffled from Luke's chest. She relaxed and let go of him, looking up into his eyes as she stepped back. "Your theory sounds very plausible to me. And again, how big an idiot am I for not realizing this?"

Luke smiled and took her hands into his. "You were too involved to look at this and analyze it." He felt a pang of guilt at his own words because he'd decided to stay with Lily instead of Demon, but at the same time, he was glad he'd done that. "But instinctively you knew--you weren't concerned about the pain."

Lily nodded and gave him a wicked grin. "See? I told you everything would be all right."

John grinned at him over Lily's head. "You'd better listen to her from now on."

Luke let out an exaggerated sigh and shook his head in resignation.

Demon drifted back to consciousness, drawn by a sound that seemed to pull at her heart, a wailing so intense that it hurt. She opened her eyes to see Matthew sitting by her bed, holding their baby, gently rocking him as he cried.

"I was hoping that you'd wake up. I think he's hungry, but I haven't got a clue what to do about it."

Demon pulled herself up against the pillows. "I don't think you're equipped to do anything. In theory, I have the equipment, but in practice I haven't got a clue how to use it." She held her arms out and Matthew carefully passed the baby over. Demon held the baby close to her, his head in the crook of her arm, lifting him until his mouth touched her nipple. She used her free hand to gently stroke the side of the baby's mouth and was delighted to see that his mouth immediately opened wide. Moving him a little was sufficient for him to attach himself to her breast and he started to feed.

She looked back up at Matthew and grinned. "Well, for once, the books were right." Her smile gradually disappeared as she saw the expression on his face. He wasn't frowning, he wasn't smiling, he just looked sad. "What is it? Is something wrong?"

Demon watched as Matthew reached into his pocket and brought out a piece of paper. He unfolded it and held it out to her. She shifted her hold on the baby slightly to free a hand, and took the paper from him. As soon as she looked at it, she felt a shaft of pain cut through her and she bit her lip hard to prevent the cry that threatened to escape her. Demon turned her head away from Matthew while she pulled herself under control, only turning back when she had her face frozen into an expressionless mask. Working hard to keep her voice steady, she asked, "Where did you find this?"

She could see that Matthew was watching her intently, trying to read her feelings as he replied, "On the floor of the empty cell."

Demon had to turn away from him again as her control slipped and a tear escaped her. "I didn't think she hated me that much, but she must if she couldn't even bear to take my letter with her." Her control deserted her as the tears rolled down her cheeks. She felt Matthew's hand reach across and gently pull her head round until he could see her face. Demon looked up at him, still keeping her face expressionless as he spoke softly.

"I doubt if she hates you. I don't think anyone could hate you. God knows I've spent the last hour trying."

The pain inside Demon doubled at his words and she forced herself to speak past a lump in her throat that threatened to choke her. "I'm surprised you're still here." She dragged her eyes away from Matthew and down to the baby.

"I'm sort of surprised myself. I was ready to wring your neck when I found out what you'd done."

She looked back up at him. "What stopped you?"

Matthew's face relaxed a little as he reached out and stroked her jaw line, then down her neck to her shoulder. "Well, it's a very beautiful neck, so it seemed a shame, and Luke had some things to say that made sense. But I have to know, Deborah. Why did you do it this way? Why couldn't you trust me?"

Demon was devastated to hear the pain and disappointment in his voice. "But I do trust you, Matthew. Of course I trust you! I just don't trust your system of justice. and I couldn't take the risk that Angel would become a victim of that system. I would never have asked you to break your promise to Dureena. This way, it's my fault. If Dureena wants to blame someone, it's me she can come to, not you. I had to save Angel, but I couldn't, I wouldn't, ask you to go back on your word. This was the only way."

Matthew bent and kissed her forehead. "I understand why you thought that, but maybe in the future we can try to share some of the load? Luke was right; we really are a matched pair, but there's something you have to be clear about. My promise to Dureena hasn't dissipated. I'll still keep looking for Angel. You know that, don't you?"

Demon nodded and whispered back. "Yes, but I can hope that you'll never find her and that one day Dureena will be satisfied that it's enough if Lucas is punished for his crime." She waited for his reaction and the pain inside her dissolved as Matthew smiled and moved to sit on the edge of the bed and put his arm around her. She turned her head into his shoulder and tried to control her relief and joy that he hadn't left her, fiercely quelling her tears. Suddenly, Demon's emotions welled up inside her and washed over her in a wave. She felt Matthew stiffen as she leaned against him, then he moved his hand back to her chin to lift her face up to look at him.

"That felt very much as if you're sending again." He smiled down at her. "Looks like your empathic abilities are back."

Demon could feel what he was feeling! She could feel his sorrow and the last residue of his anger, but most of all, she could feel his love. She buried her head back in Matthew's shoulder and fought down the wave of emotion that threatened to escape her again. When she had herself under control, she lifted her head and looked up at him hopefully. He smiled and leaned forward to take her mouth with his in a gentle but passionate kiss.

Matthew leaned back against the head of the bed and Demon leaned against his shoulder as he spoke again. "There's another thing we need to talk about."

Demon looked up warily. "What?"

"Do you have any idea what to call the baby? We've never discussed a name. What do you think?"

She smiled. "I did have one idea, but I don't know if you'll like it. I thought that as we already have a Matthew, a Luke and a John around, then maybe we should add a Mark to complete the set."

Matthew started to laugh. "Mark Gideon. I don't know. Sounds a bit abrupt, somehow."

Demon agreed. "I know. That's why I thought that Marcus sounded better. What do you think? And do you want him to take your name? Marcus Montgomery works as well, I think."

Matthew squeezed her shoulders tightly. "He's my son; therefore, he goes by my name. Hopelessly chauvinistic and very old-fashioned, but there it is. And I like it. Marcus Gideon he is." He kissed her forehead and leaned down to whisper in her ear. "There's just one more thing."

Demon pulled her head back and looked at him suspiciously again. "What?"

"When you've finished feeding young Marcus, I'm going to find a way of getting you to a shower. As much as I love the smell of you, at the moment it's a bit overpowering."

"Matthew, you really know how to flatter a woman."

Lily spread her legs wide as she squatted in the water again, leaning on the edge of the bath tub, grunting and moving her pelvis in circles as another wave of pain hit her. Her contractions came at ever-shorter intervals and had become stronger again, though nothing like during Demon's labor. But pain had never scared her, and the thought of soon holding her son and daughter in her arms gave her additional strength. She relaxed and leaned her head on the tub's edge when the contraction finally ebbed.

Moments later, her head came back up again as she felt a wave of relief and overwhelming joy roll over her. She could hear Luke say in a startled voice, "Hey, what...?" and John's excited answer, "Demon is sending again!" Lily wanted to sing with joy!

Suddenly she felt something wash out of her vagina, and when she looked down she could see a new liquid mix with the water. Lily swallowed, for a moment torn between elation and agitation, then let go of her feelings with a deep breath and called, "Luke? I think they're getting serious."

John and Luke appeared in the bathroom in record time.

"My water broke," Lily said in a calm voice.

Luke nodded as he saw the slow constant flow emerging from between her thighs. "Do you want to stay in the water or get out? You know that there's even less risk of infection in the water, so..." He covered her hand with his, noticing a slight nervousness beneath her calm behavior as he looked into her eyes.

Lily's eyes rested on his face for several seconds, then on John's, who smiled at her as he took her free hand and squeezed it reassuringly. She suddenly felt the need to be held, and while that was possible in the water, she also felt an urge to stand up straight and be free to walk around. "Get me out."

Both men stood and helped her out of the tub, then Luke hurried to enfold her in a warm blanket. He lingered for a few seconds as Lily leaned into his embrace, and kept his arms around her while John rubbed her red mane dry with a towel. Then both men led her back into the side room, one on either side of her, holding her arms gently.

When she stepped over the threshold, Lily felt a strange sensation, too weak to be called a tickle or a shiver. [As if I had passed an energy shield.] She felt strange, fully aware of the moment and yet far away, detached from everything, and drifting off farther with every step she took.

In a flash she saw the face of a woman--red wavy hair, wet where it touched her face, encircling finely chiseled features. The face was big, looming over her, yet she felt safe as the woman gazed down at her lovingly with her brownish-green eyes and smiled. Lily recognized the woman, though she was younger than she remembered. [Younger than I had remembered her before the Vorlon took that memory away from me,] she realized with a shock. She reached out to that face, wanting to touch it, but the vision blurred and disappeared. "Mother!"

She found herself back--[Where?]-with Luke and John holding her shoulders and looking at her worriedly. [What happened? Where am I? Right--the infirmary,] Lily thought, then realized that Luke had asked her something at least twice, and he was repeating it again.

"Are you all right? Lily!"

She blinked, still feeling slightly disoriented, then nodded curtly. When she looked down, she noticed the blanket had fallen down to the ground and lay pooled at her feet.

Luke's concern was obvious in his voice when he said, "What happened? Can you tell me? You stopped dead in mid-step and stared at nothing, and you called out 'Mother'."

Lily's eyes grew big as she heard him say that last word, and a lump formed in her throat. "I saw her," she whispered, "I saw my mother, as I saw her after my birth!"

John and Luke exchanged a surprised glance. Lily had told them that she couldn't remember how her parents looked since the Vorlon 'treatment'. She suspected that rather than having been erased, these memories had been suppressed or blocked by whatever genetic enhancement enabled her to block other telepaths. Could this have been a long-lost memory resurfacing, indicating that she was right?

Suddenly, Lily said in a shaky voice, "Luke?"

Luke turned back to her and saw that her voice wasn't the only thing that was shaky. Her body was trembling, and he quickly got hold of her before she could fall, gently holding her just below her breasts and bending his knees slightly, thus steadying her against his body. "It's OK. Your body needs to get rid of the tension. Just remember, breathe deeply," he said soothingly, a concentrated look in his eyes as his other hand moved over her lower abdomen, trying to gauge the positions of the babies. Lily automatically nodded and did as she was told. John took her hands and massaged them softly.

After a while, the shaking subsided. Lily shrugged off Luke's embrace and slipped her hands out from John's, then went to her cushion pile, kneeling down in front of it and leaning forward, wrapping her arms around it.

John was watching, noticing the faraway look in Lily's eyes. "What is it?" He asked Luke softly.

"Transition," Luke answered in a low voice, "This is the time between the first and second stage. It can last any time between a few seconds and two hours."

Gideon walked out into the main infirmary feeling a lot better than when he'd walked in. Deborah and Marcus were both asleep again, and he'd promised her that he'd get some sleep himself before he came back to see her. He glanced through the window of the operating room and could see that Sarah and Alwyn were both still in there, working on Lucas. He could hear that Lily, Luke, and John were still in the side room where they'd been all night.

He walked over to the dining room where he half expected to find Ilas, Max, and Dureena having breakfast, but the place was deserted. Gideon thought about going to Ilas' rooms to find her and tell her that he expected her to let Dureena know about Angel's escape, but decided that it could wait. His stomach was complaining bitterly, and he realized that he hadn't eaten since lunch the previous day. Having been without sleep for over twenty-four hours, Gideon was almost too tired to eat, but as the food was all there, laid out on the sideboard, he decided he might as well get something.

He'd nearly finished when Sarah and Alwyn entered the room. Gideon waited until they had gotten food for themselves and joined him at the table before asking, "How's Lucas? Will he live?"

Sarah swallowed and nodded before she spoke. "He should do. We got the knife out eventually, and managed not to damage the spinal cord any further, but the blade had grazed it and there was considerable further internal injury. He's stable now and I'm keeping him sedated." She took another bite, chewed, then swallowed before continuing. "But we can't move him for a while."

Gideon frowned and asked. "How long?"

Sarah shook her head. "It depends on how he progresses. I'd say it'll be at least a couple of days yet."

Gideon winced. He'd already been away from his ship for over five days. Two more before Lucas could be moved and another two days traveling? Every day increased the risk that their cover story would be blown. But it did mean two more days he could spend with Deborah and Marcus. He thanked Sarah and turned to Alwyn.

"When can I take Deborah out of the infirmary? She wants to go back to her rooms."

"Whenever she feels fit to walk. That regenerator is a marvelous little thing, but she'll still feel very sore and tender for a while. Walking isn't going to be much fun, but she needs to start moving around as soon as she can."

Gideon smiled at the Technomage. "Thanks. And thanks for your help. I may not have shown it at the time, but I did appreciate it. Deborah's asleep right now and I'm going to follow her example, but Kirrin is going to call me as soon as she wakes and I'll go get her then." He stood and pulled his jacket from the back of the chair. "If you can leave your patient, I'd suggest that you both get some sleep. It's been a long night. Call me if you need me or if there's any change in Lucas's condition."

He left the dining room and detoured via Ilas' rooms. She emerged into the corridor when he asked to have a private word with her. At first she looked wary, then relieved when she saw he wasn't angry. Gideon explained what he expected of her and Ilas agreed that it was fair.

"I'll tell Dureena right now. And Captain?" Ilas looked up at him, her red cat's eyes wide. "How's Demon? I can't get through to her. Is she all right?" Gideon could sense the question that she didn't want to ask.

"She's fine. She's had the baby and we're calling him Marcus. They're both sleeping right now, but I'll go and bring them back to our rooms when they wake up." He knew that his use of the words 'we' and 'our' would give Ilas the reassurance she wanted but didn't ask for. "Don't worry, Ilas, she and Lily are just fine."

Ilas looked up in dismay. "Lily? What's happened to Lily? I've been trying to send to both of them, but the link is disrupted. I can't make contact. Is something wrong with Lily? What is it?"

Gideon could see that she was becoming increasingly agitated and hastened to calm her. "Ilas, Lily is all right. Calm down! Deborah's going into labor seems to have triggered Lily, too. I don't understand how that link of yours works, but it's something to do with that. But they're both fine. Lily is still in labor and probably will be for some time, according to Luke. There's nothing you can do. Just go back to bed and give Dureena the news, will you? That's the best thing you can do for everyone right now." He watched as Ilas reluctantly nodded and returned to her rooms.

Gideon left her and sighed with relief when he finally got back to the rooms he shared with Deborah. Walking into the bedroom, he undressed and looked at the large white bed, thinking about the only other time he'd slept in it alone. That had been the night he met Deborah, when she'd rescued him and brought him back here. As Gideon climbed into bed, he remembered waking up and seeing her naked back in the dim light, then making love to her. That had been eight months before and he would never have believed that his life could change so much in so short a time. He now had a woman he loved, a son, and from what Sarah had told him, they were damned close to getting the final piece they needed in their search for a cure. [Now if I can just avoid getting court-martialed for going AWOL, life will be perfect,] was Gideon's last thought as he drifted into sleep.

Lily felt the baby's head emerge at the same time as Luke announced in a soft voice, "Crowning." She was squatting against her cushion pile, allowing her body to go along with the expulsive contractions. It was a most extraordinary experience as she felt herself being stretched by her baby's head. And the feelings didn't only come from herself, but also from her daughter.

"Can I...?" Lily asked, and when Luke smiled and nodded, she reached between her legs, feeling for the tiny head that was emerging from her womb. When her fingers found fresh, damp skin and soft hair covered by something creamy, a shiver ran through her. [[Be calm, my daughter. Soon you will be with us.]] She could feel fear, but also confidence and love from the tiny being, and an echo from her son, who was still waiting to be expelled from the semi-dark shelter he and his sister had inhabited for the past eight months. [[Yes, I love you, too.]] Her eyes were tearing as she smiled at Luke and John.

"Want to get up?" Luke asked softly.

Lily nodded and accepted his hands to help her stand, then turned to John, looking at him with concern in her eyes.

"Are you sure? I know touching makes it harder for you to block. There are other ways to do this, you know."

John firmly shook his head. "If you prefer this position, then that's what we'll do. I would never forgive myself if I missed this. Besides, while massaging your back earlier. I had the chance to get used to some pain." He unhesitatingly stepped behind her, placed his feet apart, and bent his knees while tensing the muscles of his thighs and buttocks to carry Lily's weight against his pelvis. Keeping his back straight and shoulders relaxed, he passed his hands under her arms, palms upwards, and as Lily laced her fingers through his, he gently squeezed them. Lily smiled as she leaned into him and allowed herself to relax as much as possible, letting John carry most of her weight.

Luke squatted down before her to follow the baby's progress closely. He had put a soft cloth between her feet and had several instruments within arm's reach in case there were any complications.

When the next contraction hit Lily, John instinctively raised his shields to block out the pain--surprised to find that it was accompanied by an almost ecstatic feeling--but dropped them again immediately, touching her mind with his and enfolding her in a soft mental embrace. He could feel her gratitude, but also her concern. [[If you can take it, I can too,]] he sent to Lily, amazed at her sense of calm confidence that lay like a quiet lake beneath the mist of pain. He found that it affected him too, diminishing his nervousness and insecurity. On a hunch, he reached out to Luke when Lily's pain subsided, silently asking permission to touch his mind. Luke flinched slightly at the unexpected contact, then opened his mind, and John shared with him what he had felt from Lily.

Luke drew in his breath as the echo of Lily's pain hit him, but at the same time felt reassured by her confidence and faith. It wasn't blind, but born out of an intimate knowledge of her body, and a deep trust in Mother Nature. Luke looked up at John, nodding his silent thanks, then at Lily, smiling to let her know that he trusted her instincts. She smiled back at him, then the next contraction hit her.

"Go with your instincts, Lily. Your body knows what to do," Luke told her. "You can do it with the next one. Just open up and let her out."

Lily was panting, but nodded and tried to relax as much as possible in the brief respite. The next contraction that hit her was especially forceful; she went down low, feeling her daughter slip out of the birth canal and into Luke's arms. John helped her go down on her knees and sit back on her heels, so she could rest until the contractions started again, then he moved next to her and did the same.

Luke put the first-born baby into Lily's arms, cord still intact. "Our daughter," he said in a hoarse

voice.

Lily wrapped the tiny girl in her arms and looked down at her lovingly. She had the most perfect delicate features, a soft down of reddish-blond hair already visible on her scalp. After a few moments, her eyes focused on Lily's face, causing her to smile. "You are greeted with much love by all of us, Faylinn Sahar," she said, then looked up, beaming as she presented their daughter to Luke and John. "She's incredible."

Luke felt tears in his eyes as he smiled at her. "Just as beautiful as her mother." He half kneeled, half squatted beside Lily, leaning against her side, and curved his arm around hers. His fingers gently touched Faylinn's arm, which like her whole body, was still covered with the white buttery substance that would be absorbed by her skin within a few hours.

John laid his right arm around Lily's shoulders, looking down at their daughter, his left hand cradling the tiny head. He felt a turmoil of vague emotions touch him, but mostly wonderment, total trust, and love. His mind was searching for words to express what he felt, but failed utterly. John found himself too overwhelmed to say anything.

For what seemed a long time, they just sat there, child and parents getting to know each other, staring at each other in amazement, strengthening their bond. But suddenly, she felt her son preparing to leave her womb. "John, would you take Faylinn? Her brother wants to join her."

After Luke had wrapped her in a soft cloth and had shown John how to hold her, he took his daughter into his arms a bit awkwardly. The umbilical cord was still connecting her to Lily, who still sat on her heels, but was breathing deep again, preparing for the last contractions.

Luke did a quick scan of her belly, which was considerably smaller now. He nodded. "Almost perfect position."

Lily nodded her acknowledgment and went on all fours, rotating her hips gently to help her son finalize his turn inside her womb. Soon the first contraction hit her, and from then everything seemed to go incredibly fast for her. She barely heard Luke announce their son's head crowning, so immersed was she in the feeling, and then she felt her son slip out of her.

"There you are," Luke said as he passed him through her knees and put him face down on the towel he'd prepared there. Lily sank back onto her heels again, leaning against Luke's chest, and lifted her son into her arms as John knelt down next to her, still cradling their daughter. The boy seemed slightly smaller than his sister, Lily noticed, but looked healthy. Though this early after birth it was hard to tell, she imagined he would have a skin color similar to John's. He already had a surprisingly full mop of black hair, and eyes with a distinct Asian form.

She smiled at him as his eyes searched her face. "You, too, are greeted with much love by all of us, Dasha," she declared in a hoarse voice. Lily was almost overwhelmed with happiness--her two babies were here, and they were all right! John and Luke gently touched their son, stroking his soft, wrinkled skin, kissing Lily, happy that everything had gone well.

Finally, Lily shifted her son to her right arm and looked at John. "I'll take Faylinn again." He put the baby into her left arm so she crossed over Dasha and each head was leaning against one of her breasts. She looked down at the two tiny beings in her arms, sending them her love and happiness, overjoyed to find they answered in kind. From Faylinn she felt something more, and looked up at Luke. "I think Faylinn is hungry."

Luke helped her position their daughter so she could latch on her nipple, which she promptly did. The sensations that went through her body as the baby sucked on her nipple were indescribable! At the same time, she felt a 'hunger' impulse from Dasha, and after Luke had helped her latch him onto her right breast, both of them drank from her eagerly for a while, finally falling asleep in her arms.

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The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

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