

The Gift



From *Triorion: The Series*

***This story takes place between the events of *Triorion: Reborn – Part II* (book four) and *Triorion: Nemesis* (book five)**

To **J. Zarathustra**—
thanks for so many things,
but most of all
your friendship.

Jaeia found her sister at the Starbase's mission prep station, bent over the primary interface. The intensity in Jetta's face would have fooled anyone else into thinking she was reviewing her ops files, but not her telepathic sister.

"Don't you launch in fifteen?" she asked, coming up beside her.

No response. Instead, Jetta pulled up several more files. Blue holographics filled the room with images of a man Jaeia would rather not ever see again. Even the statistical data readouts sent a chill down her spine.

1.92 meters, 113 kg. Balding, tan skin; Cerran. Last seen in the Community Housing Projects, District 6.

Looking away didn't help. With her mind tethered to her sister's, she saw their former owner through Jetta's eyes, compounding her fear.

"I know what we agreed, and I don't care," Jetta said, freezing the full-body image in the middle of the projector. "We can't just let him go."

Jaeia dove past her sister's words into the old memories behind them. They leaked through in a dysphoric rush: Dark eyes, rough, drunken hands that tossed her out of her cot in the middle of the night. The sour stink of alcohol, a wicked laugh.

We are three again, she sent through their bond, trying to soothe her sister's tension. *We have nothing to fear.*

But her own subconscious challenged her assertion, clamping down and twisting her stomach into knots.

(Then why am I still afraid?)

Only a few weeks ago, all three of them had confronted Yahmen, then left him as he was. Even Jahx, who had suffered the worst at his hands, saw justice in leaving their owner to his own ruin. Squatting in the burnt remains of their old apartment on Fiorah, Yahmen would only last so long. Soon, crime bosses and drug pushers would sniff him out and do far worse to him than the Starways justice system ever could.

Firming up her voice, Jaeia dared to ask the question: "What made you change your mind?"

A flicker of anger touched the back of her perceptions, then vanished behind an invisible partition. *She's wavering between a half-truth and an outright lie*, Jaeia sensed, watching her sister check the guns strapped to her hips.

"A gut feeling."

No, more than that, Jaeia sensed, feeling around her sister's words. "You've been having nightmares."

Jetta shut off the projector with her knuckles. "That's rude."

"We're sisters, you know," Jaeia said, crossing her arms. "Even without telepathic powers, or some ancient entity binding us, I'd still figure it out."

Green eyes narrowed.

"You talk in your sleep."

Jetta blushed. On more than one recent occasion, she had come to her sister's quarters, talked with her until deep into the early hours, and fallen asleep in Jaeia's bed. Despite their cumulative age, their military stations, and all the other reasons not to act like they were still

kids, Jaeia enjoyed curling up next to her sister and rekindling the few precious moments of their youth.

Not wanting to embarrass her sister, Jaeia sent a silent message of comfort. *I love when you sleep over, Jetta; it's just like old times.*

Grumbling, Jetta snagged her jacket from the back of a chair and threaded her arms through the sleeves.

"How did you get the authorization to run this mission?" Jaeia asked as her twin collected the last of her things, a few datapads and an extra cartridge of ammunition, from their perch on the console.

"I am the chief, you know."

"Co-chief, if I may remind you."

"You know why," Jetta said, finally looking at her in the eye. Green eyes, fraught with burden, held her gaze. "This is my mission."

"Wait—who's on your roster?" Jaeia plucked the datapad from Jetta's hands and shielded herself as her sister tried to steal it back. "Just you and Almos? At least take Pogo and Decker with you."

"Any ops on Fiorah takes finesse. I can't take a full team."

"Not even a tenth of a team," Jaeia said, giving back the datapad with a bit of force. Too frustrated for words, Jaeia let the rest of the conversation play out across their shared bond.

I thought we were past this, Jetta; that you weren't going to run off by yourself.

I'm not running away, and I'm not by myself!

Listen to me, Jaeia said, taking her hand. We made a decision to leave Yahmen as he was. You have to let go of the past, or it will destroy all we have accomplished, and all that is possible going forward.

Jetta turned away and walked to the door.

"Why are you doing this?" Jaeia said, stopping her sister.

Unwanted emotions trickled around Jetta's carefully erected psionic barrier. Jaeia filtered through the anger and grief as best she could, but not without tears welling in her own eyes.

Jetta looked her sister dead in the eye. "Did you see into my nightmares?"

Shaking her head, Jaeia saw the dark images before Jetta formed the words to describe them.

"I don't know who—or what—is out there," Jetta whispered. Glimpses of her sister's nightmares formed in her mind: Triel, naked and weakened, reaching out across the great divide as a massive creature, unfurling from the darkened skies, knitted together from shadows and spilt blood. Yahmen's cackle, the cold chill of death. "But I have to find whatever it is, and stop it. I can't let anything happen to her," she said, touching her stomach.

"I can't let you," Jaeia said, grabbing the back of her jacket as she tried to turn back around.

Unbalanced, Jetta flailed, her hands grabbing for the nearest object. The razor's edge of a holographic projector sliced into her palm.

"*Skucheka!*" she cursed in Fiorahian, pulling her left hand back and cradling it against her chest.

"I'm so sorry, Jetta, let me see—"

Jetta grimaced, but then relaxed, her lips forming words she did not speak.

“Jetta...?”

Holding onto her sister’s shoulders, Jaeia looked beyond her sister’s face. *What’s wrong? What’s happening?*

Through their bond, Jaeia watched as her sister turned inward, drawing in the surrounding lights of the psionic plane and illuminating a place within herself hidden from waking thought. Although her sister’s reach extended beyond her sights, Jaeia experienced her joy as a connection, though faint, bridged an impossible schism between worlds.

“My Gods,” Jetta said, bringing them both back. “Look.”

Jaeia took her sister’s outstretched hand. Beneath the blood that wetted her palm, there was no gash, but a closed pink line of tissue. “Did you do that?”

“No. Yes? I don’t know.”

Unable to believe her eyes, Jaeia accessed their shared thoughts, trying to solve the problem through their joint perspective.

“Triel...” she whispered, sensing a lingering presence on the edge of Jetta’s mind.

Tears formed in her sister’s eyes, and she took her hand back. “Impossible.”

“Not impossible,” Jaeia countered. “You two are one now.”

Jetta stumbled over to the mission prep station and gripped the controls, a few tears escaping down her cheeks. After Triel saved the last surviving Prodigies, she disappeared from their world. According to her father and Prodigy leader, she had become the Great Mother and ascended to Cudal. In some moments, when Jetta felt completely free, she claimed to experience her love. But in her darker moments, when she grieved her loss, she perceived only the pain of their separation.

Joining her sister, Jaeia watched as Jetta punched up the mission specs. Once again, the holographics rendered their owner’s severe face, the embodiment of a nightmare no one else could possibly understand.

“He’s not worth it, Jetta,” Jaeia said, touching her left hand. “Pursuing him will only drag you down into his hell.”

Voice deserting her, Jetta whispered across their connection. *You’re right.*

“Stay here, with me, and Jahx.” She opened her sister’s left hand, once again revealing the bloody mess over the healing wound. “Don’t sacrifice this gift.”

Jetta clicked off the projector and turned to her sister. “You up for squishing some bugs?”

“Not that stupid Antimarant combat sim again,” Jaeia groaned. “The lava flows, the stink; I don’t get your obsession.”

“The great are often misunderstood.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“And you are going to lose, five-to-one,” Jetta said, strutting out the door.

Whatever, Jaeia said across their bond. *Just don’t be a sore loser when I whoop you.*

She paused at the door, her senses picking up something before her mind could process what it was. Turning, she saw Yahmen’s face on the holographic projectors, the corners of his mouth tacked up in some deranged smile.

Fear spiked her heart, filling her lungs with a scream, but as the cry rose in her throat, a hand clamped down on her shoulder.

“You coming, slowpoke?”

Jarred by her sister's voice, she looked back to the mission prep station. The entire interface was off, just as Jetta had left it.

Gods, she thought to herself, inhaling sharply. *He still gets in my head.*

"Ack, hold on," Jetta said, messing with the com on her uniform sleeve. She stabbed at the glowing letters. "I'm getting some interference or something; I can't seem to get through to Almos. I'll have to swing by the docking bay. Oh wait—there it goes."

She didn't sense what just happened?

Jaeia didn't know how to react.

No, I won't share this, she decided. *If she thinks there's any reason at all, she'll take up that mission again. I can't let that happen.*

She hid her trembling hands and put on her best smile as she boarded a lift with her sister. *It's just my imagination.*

In the back of her mind, she saw his face again, his demented grin spreading his face into impossibly wide proportions. He called out to her in a voice ravaged by unconscionable torments. *I'm coming for you...*

Jaeia Kyron looked to her sister, seeing the glimmer in her eye, the way she brought her left hand up to her heart and held it there as they sped down the corridors. Burying her dark thoughts in the deepest parts of herself, she chose what she saw, submitting herself to the truth she held dearest.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Jetta said, raising a brow.

"You're *so* going down. Ten-to-one."

Jetta grinned. "It's on."