

# Triptych

By

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Patient's Name: Herald Kaylan Elderwood

Gender: Male

Orientation: *Shaych*

Age: 30

Gift(s): Fetching (extremely strong); can use Companions to work in tandem with Herald Yarik Rafton.

Known Trauma: While on a war-related assignment, subject was taken prisoner by a unit of Hardornans; subject suffered various forms of physical abuse, including severe beatings and multiple rapes.

Profile: Subject has difficulty falling asleep since the incident at Valeton; he often resorts to extreme physical exhaustion or draughts supplied by his healer, and subject usually reports nightmares upon waking. He does not exhibit any obsessive-compulsive behaviors. He displays overtly clinging behavior toward his lifebonded, Herald Yarik Rafton, and tolerates the third member of the threesome, Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn; subject executes his duties efficiently but avoids social contact with all others in the vicinity. (Herald Yarik suspects that the subject might be willing to socialize with close family members; a trip to the family estates might be possible if Herald Yarik accompanied the subject. But until the subject does not require daily care from a Mindhealer, such an excursion is impossible.) Subject is severely depressed, though he will not admit this. Subject's anxiety level is fairly normal as long as he remains in areas where he feels safe or is in the company of Herald Yarik; any attempt to send the subject beyond the Palace and Collegium grounds

results in a massive panic attack, a flashback event, and an episode of irrational rage, followed by several hours of nonresponsiveness. Subject harbors deep hostility toward his attackers, even though he used his Gift to destroy everyone who played a direct role in harming him. Paranoid ideation extends only to his flashbacks.

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Healer Paige glanced up from her notes. "You stopped talking again."

The lanky herald who lounged on the sofa across the room from where she had set her chair shoved his black hair away from his handsome face. Only faint bruises remained from the mess the bandits had made of his appearance. In a few more weeks, a few scars on his back would be the only visible evidence that anything untoward had happened to the elegant man. "I ran out of things to say."

The healer leveled her gaze at the Herald, waiting for him to make eye contact with her.

Kaylan raised his bright blue eyes to match the challenge in Paige's green ones.

The Healer clicked her tongue against the back of her front teeth. He appeared so calm, so normal. But threaten to send Herald Yarik on an overnight message run or ask Kaylan to carry a message to someone within half a day of Haven, and the collected figure slipped into a vivid flashback of his trauma and raved about his Gift being out of control. Everyone who had examined him had assured her that his control over his Gift was actually exceptional, even extraordinary, considering what he had been through. That superior control was part of what had the Circle so frustrated. They needed Kaylan on the Border, helping to fight the war. His Gift was strong enough that he could stay well behind Valedamaren lines and still be of tremendous use, retrieving information from spies, shifting critical supplies where they needed to go, and a million other things that would make things so much easier for the troops. "Tell me about how you used your Gift to destroy the Hardornans who attacked you."

"You already know everything there is to tell," Kaylan shrugged.

The movement reminded Paige of a great cat-like creature she had once seen in the Pelagirs. "Humor me."

The Herald surged to his feet and paced the confines of the suddenly too small room. "There's nothing more to tell. I misused my Gift. I used my power to kill. Yarik forgave me. Danya forgave me. Talia forgave me. Even the Queen forgave me. You are the only other person who knows what I did, what I'm capable of."

"What about Herald Pherris?" the healer suggested lightly, naming the Firestarter who had torched the inn where Kaylan had slain his attackers. "Or Healer Bertrice?" she added.

Kaylan shook his head violently. "No. Danya said they did not know, that Pherris torched the building without asking what was inside. She would not lie to me about that. She only saw through Yarik's Gift. Yarik alone saw the reality."

"And you," Paige said softly.

The Herald gave a sharp laugh.

The sound grated on the Healer's nerves, causing her to clench her teeth.

"See it?" Kaylan choked. "I caused it."

"Which frightens you more?" Paige asked on a sudden inspiration. "That you know your Gift can be used in this manner, that you have used your Gift in this manner or that someone else might order you to use your Gift in this manner?"

The Herald abruptly collapsed onto the sofa. "I'm not sure."

The Healer heard the honesty in his response. "Try eliminating one of them. Take the first. Do you regret that you know you can cause such horrible destruction with your Gift?"

Kaylan bit his lower lip for a moment before speaking. When he did reply, his voice was very soft. "No. At the time, Yarik told me that Danya could have done what I did. I think he's wrong. Her Fetching Gift is not strong enough, and she has so many other things she can do. Her rage is calculated

and seeks outlets through all of her options. I only have one thing I can do."

"Why didn't you Fetch your Bonds away as Danya did for you?" Paige pressed.

The Herald clenched his fists. "Yarik thinks there was something about the bonds that disabled my Fetching. I think I stopped thinking. The instant I knew Adele was seriously hurt, my brain simply stopped working."

"You, very understandably, went into shock," Paige reminded him.

Kaylan snorted. "I should have stayed there." He shook his head. "No. I don't mean that. I would have died if I hadn't snapped out of my stupor when I did. But I wasn't thinking any more clearly when I started moving than when I was in shock. What I did is completely inexcusable, though everyone I care about has told me otherwise. I'm a *Herald*, and I simply reacted. I didn't think. I was out of control." He hung his head, letting his hair fall back over his eyes. "I still am."

"Why?" Paige asked softly. She let the question hang between them until Kaylan made up his mind to answer it.

The Herald sighed. "I don't know."

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Patient's Name: Herald Yarik Rafton

Gender: Male

Orientation: Bisexual

Age: 22. Maybe.

Gift(s): Farsight and Mindspeech; can work in tandem with Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn and, through the Companions, with Herald Kaylan Elderwood.

Known Trauma: Most of his youth was spent as a captive of pirates on Lake Evendim who abused him sexually.

Profile: Subject is remarkably well adjusted, considering his past. He claims to have a double lifebond with Herald Kaylan Elderwood and Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn. He sleeps well and rarely has dreams he recalls. He does not exhibit any obsessive-compulsive behaviors. He tolerates Herald Kaylan's

clinging behavior well, and he is very supportive of Herald-Trainee Danya; subject executes his duties as efficiently as ever but divides his free time equally between his two partners rather than socializing with outsiders. Subject is not depressed, though his anxiety level is a bit high when in the presence of both of his partners. Subject harbors a quiet rage against the Hardornans who attacked his lifebonded; the subject's rage runs very deep, but it's possible that even his lifebondeds don't realize it's there since he hides it beneath an unshakeable sense of peace, happiness and well being. There is no evidence of paranoid ideation. Subject's superiors fear that the outer calm is merely a façade that will crack without warning and let the rage free. That fear is probably justified since what happened to his partner must certainly recall the events that happened to the subject during his formative years.

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Healer Paige sat in her chair, pretending to review her notes while listening to Herald Yarik Rafton prattle on. Unlike Herald Kaylan, the problem with Herald Yarik was to get him to stop talking long enough to listen. Paige's trained ear heard the nervousness behind the endless chatter. She had long ago stopped listening to the words, letting the cadence of the Herald's speech flow over her. "What are you afraid of?" she interrupted.

Yarik blinked at her. "Excuse me?"

Paige leaned forward. "You've told me what you think the Circle, Kaylan, Danya and most of the other people you've ever spoken to fear. What are you afraid of, Herald Yarik?"

The young man ran his fingers through his curly brown hair in a gesture strongly reminiscent of Herald Kaylan.

"Dying."

Paige leaned back in her chair. "Really?" Her voice did not sound convinced.

The Herald conceded the round with a slight smile. "You're right. I doubt I've ever thought twice about dying. I

generally fail to realize I was in a life-threatening situation until it's long gone. Not like Kaylan--"

"I know about Kaylan," the Healer interrupted again. "We're not here to talk about him. We're here to talk about you. What are you afraid of?"

Yarik lowered his eyes, making an honest attempt to search himself for a satisfactory answer to the question. "Losing Kaylan."

A good answer, Paige admitted. But not *the* answer. "And?"

"Or losing Danya," the Herald confessed.

Still not the answer, but close. The healer waited for Yarik's doe-like eyes to focus on her. "How are you afraid that will happen?"

"Kaylan was almost killed!" Yarik bellowed as he surged to his feet and stormed across the room to the farthest corner. "We're at war! We're Heralds! Heralds die for the Crown all the time, especially in a war!"

Paige pursed her lips, considering her next question carefully. "What are you trying to run away from, Herald Yarik? You've paced yourself into a corner. What fear has you trapped?"

Yarik gaped at her. He crumpled in on himself and sank to the floor, burying his face in his hands. "I don't want to choose between them. I can't! They both mean the world to me. I don't want Kaylan to get well and go back out on Circuit. I love having him close to me."

"What if Kaylan wasn't the one who was asked to go back out on Circuit?" Paige suggested lightly. "Illysha will probably foal before Midwinter. What if the Circle asked you to resume your full duties as a Herald come spring, when Illysha will be able to leave her foal?"

The Herald grew very still. He raised his frightened, doe-like eyes and stared at the Healer. "They wouldn't do that with the shape Kaylan is in."

"What if Kaylan got better?" Paige persisted.

Yarik relaxed slightly. "Then he could go out with me again."

"What about Danya?" The Healer let the question fall between them.

"I'd miss her terribly," the Herald admitted. "But she'd give me the strength to go. You know how it feels when you ground and center before using your Healing Gifts?" He waited for her to nod, then continued. "It's like that with us. Danya grounds me; Kaylan gives me my center. I'm fine as long as I have both of them. But if I lost one of them, it would only be a matter of time before something bad happened. If I lost them both . . ." He finished the thought with a simple shake of his head.

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Patient's Name: Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn

Gender: Female

Orientation: Heterosexual

Age: 18

Gift(s): Mindspeech, Fetching, Empathy, possibly others that haven't manifested (The Companions are "blocking" her); can work in tandem with Herald Yarik Rafton.

Known Trauma: Orphaned.

Profile: Subject is completely capable of dealing with anything life throws at her. Her only frustrations come from her close relationship with Herald Kaylan Elderwood and lifebond with Herald Yarik Rafton. She sleeps well and rarely has dreams she recalls. She does not exhibit any obsessive-compulsive behaviors. She is extremely supportive of both Heralds Kaylan and Yarik; subject executes her duties with remarkable efficiency, often rising above the call of duty in spite of her pregnancy (Note: Subject suffers from morning sickness; the Healers suspect she is carrying triplets.). When Yarik needs to be alone with Kaylan, subject socializes well with others. Subject is not depressed, though her anxiety level is a bit high when in the presence of both of her partners. Subject seems to have dealt with her own emotions regarding the attack on Herald Kaylan and is prepared to move on to the next matter

that demands her attention, most likely her developing pregnancy. There is no evidence of paranoid ideation.

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Healer Paige studied the young woman who sat comfortably on the edge of the couch. "Do you know why you're here?"

Danya smiled prettily. Her features were plain and looked decidedly Karsite, but she seemed almost radiant, as if she glowed from within. "I'm guessing it has something to do with Kaylan or Yarik rather than with me. I don't remember doing or saying anything that would cause any of my teachers to request that a Mindhealer examine me."

Paige laughed, instantly liking the young woman. "True enough. If anything, your teachers are perhaps a bit curious about how you can be so well-adjusted while being mixed up with a pair like Kaylan and Yarik."

Danya made a face. "How could I not be mixed up with them? I'm lifebonded to Yarik, and my affection for Kaylan goes far beyond the fact that he's the father of my baby." She giggled. "I suppose I should say 'babies.' I just had another Healer tell me that it's likely I'm carrying triplets. I suspect Kaylan's grandmother overdid it a bit when she made sure that I became pregnant from a single, um, . . ." She searched for a word. "Well, it wasn't exactly 'mating'; that sounds too cold. But it wasn't like making love with Yarik. I suppose 'dance' is the best word, though that's not quite right either."

"Was that awkward for you?" Paige asked lightly.

The Herald-Trainee gave a sharp laugh. "Not half as awkward as it was for Yarik, and Kaylan certainly felt about a million times more awkward about it than I did." Her eyes grew a little misty. "I wish he'd relax."

"Who?" the healer pressed. "Yarik or Kaylan?"

"Kaylan," Danya answered promptly. "Yarik would be fine if Kaylan would calm down."

Paige arched her eyebrow. "You think so?"



The Trainee nodded. "I know so. Kaylan's emotions are leaking across their lifebond. That's what's making Yarik so edgy."

"How do you know that?" The Healer tried to make the question sound idle, but she suspected that she failed.

"I can 'see' it happen," the young woman admitted. "When I 'look' at Kaylan, it's like I can see a swirly red light around him. Yarik has the same sort of light, only he looks pink instead of red. Since the attack, though, Kaylan's red light has been shot through with copper. I can 'see' that color flowing toward Yarik when they are together, giving Yarik a sort of orangish-pink glow where they touch."

Paige blinked. How a Herald-Trainee could so accurately describe the auras that Healers saw around their patients was beyond her. Companions never chose potential Healers as Heralds . . . "What about you? What do you see when you look at yourself?"

Danya studied her right hand for a moment. She settled back on the sofa and rubbed the space between her eyes with her left hand, as if she felt a headache coming on. "I see goldish-yellow. I think. It's like there's a white mist obscuring the 'light,' as if I'm wrapped in a cocoon of some type." She shrugged. "Maybe I can see Yarik and Kaylan more clearly because they are full Heralds and I'm only a Trainee."

"What happens when you are with them? What do you see?" Paige murmured, her task in interviewing the young woman nearly forgotten.

Danya closed her eyes, visualizing how they looked this morning as the three of them had awakened in the same bed and then readied themselves for the various duties that would separate them for most of the day. "There's a light orange line between Yarik's light and mine, as if our own colors are blending in perfect harmony. With Kaylan, the line between us is fainter and more of a copper with a greyish cast. The color gives me mixed feelings, so I generally try to avoid noticing that the connection is there."

Paige nodded slowly. "Your Empathy is picking up on Kaylan's depression. He hides that part of himself very well."

"Even from himself," Danya added with sudden insight.

Paige nodded again.

The Trainee sat forward on the sofa once more. She spread her legs enough so she could plant her elbows on her knees and made a steeple out of her fingers. She stared through the web of her fingers at the Healer. "Kaylan's spirit is bleeding, partially from the attack, partially from my dropping into his life. It's not in him to hate me, but he's certainly jealous of me and of what I have with Yarik. Kaylan's pushing me away, encouraging me to shield against him, not realizing that our bond is at such a deep level that I haven't the foggiest idea how to shield against him. At the same time, Kaylan's trying to pull Yarik closer but only succeeding in spreading his fears and anxieties to Yarik, which, in turn, is triggering Yarik's own deep-seated survival instinct and awakening behavior patterns that he had controlled years ago with Kaylan's love and support. Take me out of the mix, and Kaylan is happy but Yarik goes out of control. Take Kaylan out, and I'm more comfortable but Yarik once again goes out of control. Take Yarik out, and Kaylan and I probably help each other slit our wrists. Is that a fairly accurate summary of the problem?"

Paige nodded, awed at the young woman's insight.

Danya mirrored the nod. "We're like a three-legged milking chair with one of the legs suffering from a bad case of termites that is fast spreading to the second leg. The question is, what do we do?"

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Diagnosis: Subject A is falling apart due to the trauma he has suffered, and he's starting to drag Subject B down with him. Subject C is able to stabilize Subject B for the time being, but there's no surety that she can keep that up forever. Subject A is volatile and unstable. Subject B is the lynchpin in the relationship. Subject C is solidly grounded.

Recommendation: Force open the attested link between Subject A and Subject C as wide as possible. Subject C has an excellent chance of grounding Subject A the way she does

with Subject B. That should relieve the stress on Subject B enough for him to center the trio.

Risks: Subject C is an Empath and will not be able to shield anyone with a lifebond or open channel to her from the traumatic experience of delivering triplets, which will occur within six to eight months. Waiting, however, is not recommended, given the speed at which Subject A is deteriorating.

Decision: Go forward with the plan to force open the link.

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Healer Paige studied the threesome who sat on her sofa. Herald Kaylan looked terrified. Herald Yarik, sandwiched between his two lovers as always, wore a strange expression on his face, a mix of hope and pain. Herald-Trainee Danya held Yarik's left hand firmly in her right and eyed the healer with conviction.

"Do it," Danya commanded quietly.

"Yes," Yarik agreed. "It's for the best," he assured Kaylan.

The elder Herald hesitated, then nodded his assent. "If you think it will help. It's worth the risk."

Paige let out her breath, realizing only then that she had been holding it. "Please, sit over there." She pointed at three chairs she had arranged to face each other in a triangle on the other side of the room.

The threesome obeyed.

Paige looked at the trio with her healing Sight. Yarik's aura blended smoothly with Danya's. Kaylan's aura half-blended, half-dovetailed with Yarik's. The place where Danya's aura touched Kaylan's practically crackled. The Mindhealer stepped into the center of the triangle and closed her eyes. Once she was certain that she was grounded and centered, she extended her own, bright green aura to encompass the trio. She concentrated on Danya and, with a tendril of silvery light, "touched" the white cocoon that shrouded the yellow-

gold light of the young woman's aura. Paige had seen such a shroud of light around only one other Herald: Elspeth, the Heir. The Healer had no idea what the aberration meant. She tried to move the light toward the dark channel, but she met with resistance. Something wanted her to send the light through the link to Yarik. Curious, the Healer pushed her energy toward the link.

The silver thread of light shot through Yarik, wound through the link to Kaylan, stabbed into the darkened link and pierced the cocoon around Danya.

All three heralds jerked upright as if they were puppets in a street show outside an inn in Haven.

Green light flashed along the silver thread.

Slowly the link between Yarik and Kaylan shifted to a crimson tone and Yarik's color stabilized as bright pink. Kaylan's red lost most of its coppery highlights, and the link between Kaylan and Danya lost all tinges of grey.

Paige drew her power back into herself, then stumbled out of the triangle as her patients collapsed in their chairs. She decided that she had too severe of a reaction coming on to be polite; she stretched out on her own sofa. Her own power, while significant, could never have accomplished what she'd seen. Someone, somehow, had channeled additional power through her without her permission, and she was going to have the great-granddaddy of all reaction headaches to pay for it.

Danya rose and padded over to the Healer. "Should I call someone?"

Paige ignored the question. "Was that you?"

The Trainee shrugged. "Only Kernos and Astera know. I certainly don't, and I have my teachers foxed. I can do things I shouldn't be able to do, and I almost never do them the 'right' way, the way I would if I were using a Gift. I don't know what's going on, but Terrill assures me that the Companions will keep me safe. I trust him and them."

Paige gave a dry laugh. Somehow it figured that the Companions were up to their pointy ears in whatever was happening. "Go on. Get out of here. All of you. You're as

healed as I'm able to make you. Time and the three of you will have to do the rest."

Yarik stood and helped Kaylan to his feet. The two Heralds waited for the trainee to join them, then they ushered her protectively out of the room.

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Patients' Names: Herald Kaylan Elderwood, Herald Yarik Rafton, Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn.  
Current Ages: 31, 23 (Maybe), and 19, respectively.

Follow-up Report: The three subjects endured what could have been a very significant trauma the day after the Mid-Winter festival. The female subject went into labor, possibly in response to Herald Yarik's Companion, Illysha, delivering her colt, Garner. Herald-Trainee Danya Winterborn's iron control over her Gift of Empathy proved vital to the trio's weathering the trauma. The female subject gave birth to triplets over a very dangerous sixteen-hour period during which the Healers in attendance say she came near to dying as a result of complications from the number of infants being delivered. Throughout the ordeal the female subject projected endurance and love, instead of pain and fear, at the male subjects who are linked to her by what they claim is now a three-way lifebond. The inspired notion left both males on their feet and able to assist throughout the birthing process. The three identical boys--Alden, Brandon, and Conrad--are healthy and doing fine. Their mother is resting easily and is expected to make a full recovery. Heralds Kaylan and Yarik have been granted leave to care for her and their three sons until all parties are able to return to their normal duties.

By my hand,

Master Healer Paige