

Aftermath - Path into the Light

Von abgemeldet

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Kapitel 1: Realisation

Persephoneia and her Shadow Knights were defeated, Seiya and the other Bronze Saints rescued and everything was fine again. Or was it?

When Shaina freed Seiya from the cage of *adamas*, his first thoughts and questions belonged to Athena, as always. He didn't even thank the Ophiuchus Saint, even though she had put her life in the line for him once more, but turned to Marin and Aiolia who also belonged to the rescue troop. Shaina sighed.

As she looked away, her eyes met those of DeathMask's. He had been especially insufferable and abrasive since his encounter with Hekate, and she almost expected him to sneer at her, but fortunately he kept his mouth shut. If he would have said one wrong thing, she'd probably simply ripped off his head (well, at least tried to), she thought, then wondered why he didn't mock her. It certainly would have felt good to vent her frustration that way, but then, as she had gathered from the last hours, he was pretty hurt himself, and his current bouts of aggression seemed to be more a means to protect himself by trying to keep others away.

In a way it was very much the same she did herself, Shaina thought. But she had Marin as friend who wasn't put off by her attitude, while DeathMask probably had no one. It was a pity, she pondered, as he was really gorgeous, and he would definitely benefit from someone who might try to understand him.

When she caught herself at this thought, she felt her cheeks grow hot. What was she thinking? Surreptitiously she looked at him again. He *was* gorgeous indeed, but somehow she never really noticed before. Of course, he was Cancer Gold Saint DeathMask, best known as ruthless and cruel assassin, and thus she never thought of him as man. So why now?

As she looked back to Seiya and his friends who were animatedly talking with Aiolia, Camus, Shura and Marin, it became obvious to her - somehow she was always an outsider, and no matter how much she tried, she would never really belong there. Especially not with Seiya, as he made clear only moments before. With DeathMask it was just the same. He might be feared and respected - well, mainly feared, she corrected herself - but no one of the others cared to have him around. That was why he was standing apart just as she did. Well, he got along with Aphrodite, it seemed, but the Pisces Gold Saint was an outsider, too.

Now that she realised this, she felt strangely freed. She didn't have to feel indebted to Seiya for his kindness from so long ago. After all, he didn't feel indebted to her for trying to save him all the time either.

Still she didn't really understand why she suddenly had such a fuzzy feeling in her stomach when she looked at the Cancer Saint. She fought with herself if she should give in to it or try to suppress it. If she was honest with herself, she had taken an interest in him from the moment he had been attacked by Hekate and showed that he

could be vulnerable, too, but she had just pushed it away as usual as she didn't want to deal with such emotions.

"Would you care to tell me why you are trying to stare holes into my Cloth?" DeathMask asked with a highly amused undertone.

Shaina glared at him. "I just wonder if I should fall in love with you or rather kill you. And I hope for you that you won't turn me down or I *would* have to kill you!" As soon as she had uttered these words, she cursed the fact that her impulsivity had gotten the better of her like so often, and she wished she could take them back.

DeathMask couldn't help but laugh at her grim mien, before he caught himself. "I thought this thing about either falling in love or killing a guy was linked to these masks the women Saints had to wear? Ah well, as you don't wear your mask anymore, this shouldn't concern you anymore." As a matter of fact, it would be a shame if Shaina would decide to hide her beautiful face behind a mask again, he thought.

Obviously he was a little daft, Shaina thought with a mixture of hurt and anger at his reaction. But now she had nothing left to lose, and so she glowered at him. "You idiot crab, do I have to spell it out for you? I think I have fallen in love with you!"

DeathMask looked at her as if thunderstruck. Did she really say she had fallen in love with him? He was at an utter loss of words, thus he decided to stall for time somehow, so that he could think of an appropriate answer. "Would you cut calling me 'idiot crab'?" he said in irritation, but his vexation was mainly caused because he absolutely didn't know what else to say. He was used to people fearing or even loathing him - but loving him?

"What else should I call you?" Shaina hissed.

On impulse he bowed down to her. "You may call me Angelo," he said in a low voice into her ear, "but if you ever mention this to anyone else I would have to kill *you*."

Shaina stared at him in amazement. Angelo? Was that his given name? And why on earth did he tell her this?

DeathMask just asked himself the same question. What had prompted him to blurt out this normally well-kept secret of his? But it was true - he would really like it if she wouldn't use his *nom de guerre* that he originally made up to intimidate his opponents.

"I ...won't," she stammered. Was this a sign that he trusted her in some strange way? Or even more? She cursed herself for the fact that she somehow couldn't think straight in his vicinity. "As long as you don't mind me continue calling you 'idiot crab' in public." She tried to glower at him again, but somehow her gaze softened.

She was indeed cute, DeathMask observed and couldn't stifle a grin at the thought of her using this insult that somehow sounded like an endearment from her lips. Unfortunately it didn't make the situation easier for him. "Just don't expect me to tell

you that I love you," he said, appearing somewhat ill at ease. "Because I honestly don't know if I do. But what I know is that I respect your strength in battle and I think I like you being around." In fact, there were even more points that he liked about her - the fire in her bright emerald eyes, her attitude, her looks - but he really didn't know whether this already constituted 'love', and it would be way too embarrassing for him if he would tell her this.

Shaina scrutinized him and wasn't sure what she should make of his reply. Did this mean he turned her down? But why did he mention he liked her being around? "So does your reply mean I don't have to kill you after all?" she wanted to know with a wry smile.

"Well, if you want me to figure out what I feel for you, then it might be prudent if you let me live," he said dryly. "But then, I don't think you could hurt me anyway. Even if you are the strongest of them, you are still only a Silver Saint."

"Want me to try?" Shaina raised her hand and her black fingernails pointed like dangerous claws at DeathMask. She really wondered why her choice in men was so unfortunate.

"No, I don't think so." He couldn't help but smile at her belligerent stance. "Although I admire your courage to challenge me." He discovered that he didn't want to hurt her, and somehow he found this disconcerting. Ever since this woman Hekate attacked him, he caught himself at thoughts like this. How could he function properly in his job as assassin if he suddenly started to have scruples? He closed his eyes in the vain attempt to recover his poise, but he didn't fully succeed.

Shaina put her hand down again. She didn't want to fight him, she had to admit. But was he indeed able to feel something other than contempt and his hunger for power?

* * *

Shaina watched when Aiolia and Camus teleported away to report to Athena, the 5 Bronze Saints and Marin following them. The other Gold Saints had returned to Sanctuary, and this left DeathMask and Shaina alone in this place.

An uncomfortable silence began to stretch between them, until DeathMask broke it.

"I guess I'll return to Sanctuary. Want a teleport?"

"Sure..." Shaina felt her cheeks grow hot as she looked up to him. Right now she had severe doubts that it had been a good idea to confess her feelings to him. On the other hand, she did feel drawn to him. She cursed herself for the fact that she was just totally confused, and somehow her irritation grew.

DeathMask took her hand and in the next instant the familiar surroundings of Sanctuary appeared around them.

"Thanks!" It came out almost aggressively. 'And now?' she wondered. Despite her

tough demeanor, she felt totally uncertain at the moment.

DeathMask wondered if he had done something wrong. He let go of her slender hand that was mostly covered by the gauntlet of her pretty battered Ophiuchus Cloth. "And what shall we do now?" he asked, matching her tone of voice.

"I'm not sure." Shaina's deep green eyes sparkled with an anger that was more directed at herself for being so weak when facing him. Still when she looked at his face, she marvelled again that she had never realised before how handsome DeathMask was - his deep blue eyes, the cute nose and his ready smile... It was really a smile this time and not his usual smirk, she thought astonished. On a sudden impulse she grabbed two of the spikes of his mask, pulled him down to her and gave him a tentative kiss on his lips.

DeathMask was amazed at the sudden move, but the feeling of Shaina's soft lips touching his was enticing and so he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her deeply in return. Shaina was taken by surprise when her flighty kiss met such a passionate response, but without further thought she returned it, at first tentatively, then with increasing fervour. Only when she caught some breath again, she noticed the bruises the spiky Cancer Cloth had caused at her bare arms and she gave DeathMask a wry smile. "Next time we should try this without your Cloth."

DeathMask chuckled. "Only if you do without yours, too." He didn't exactly understand why Shaina acted as she did.

Shaina's cheeks reddened visibly, especially as she had to admit to herself that she was in fact looking forward to this. "Well, first you have to convince me of your honourable intent if you want me to become your woman." She folded her arms and looked challengingly at him.

"And how would you want me to do that?" If he was honest, he would like to take her to his Temple and continue where they had just stopped as their passionate kiss left him wanting for more.

"Be creative! I will only give myself to a man who has proven that he loves me." She was still all challenge. No matter how much she wanted him, she had her principles, too.

"And did Aiolia prove to you that he loved you?" DeathMask frowned dangerously. This little ménage à trois between Aiolia, Marin and Shaina had been the gossip in Sanctuary for a while.

"Are you jealous?" Shaina looked up to him in delight. If he was jealous this meant he felt more for her than he would like to admit.

"What do you expect? I don't like the idea that you seem to want to pit me against Aiolia!" He gazed at her with a sudden bout of anger. Did she suddenly want to play hard to get after she pretty clearly signaled that she wanted him?

"DeathMask - Angelo..." For the first time she used his given name that he had confided to her. "This thing with Aiolia was just pretence... I was fed up with Milo chasing after me and spreading silly rumours and Aiolia liked the ego boost that Sanctuary thought he had two girl-friends."

DeathMask stared incredulously at her. "Just ...pretence?" He wasn't sure if he could believe her this claim.

"Exactly. There has never been anything between Aiolia and me. Not even a single kiss..." Marin would probably have flayed her alive if she had dared to make any move towards Aiolia.

DeathMask was taken aback. "And what about Milo?" he inquired. The Scorpio Gold Saint had loudly proclaimed that he was going out with Shaina, too, after all.

"He wished!" Shaina bristled with anger. "You know, when I heard what he purported, he got Thunder Clawed by me, but at that time the rumours already had made the round. I thought that any denials would make things only worse."

"That means neither of them has ever been your boyfriend?" His gaze wandered covetously over her shapely body. "And has there be anyone else?"

Shaina blushed again and shook her head. She was still perplexed about herself that she actually kissed DeathMask - but it seemed like the right thing to do. And it had felt just wonderful. "That's why I would like some time to figure out if things can really work out between us, Angelo," she said softly. "Thus I expect you to prove to me that you are serious about being together with me."

When she spoke his given name in such a tender voice, DeathMask vowed that he would make her his. "I should kill Milo for spreading such rumours!" he growled in an attempt to put his mind to something he was more comfortable with. Courting rituals weren't exactly his strength. Killing was much easier.

"Don't." Shaina would have caressed DeathMask's cheek, but the headpiece of the Cancer Cloth was effectively in the way. "*You* know, I know and Milo knows - you bet it will be worse for him to see me with you than being dead." She smiled.

"You are delightfully cruel," he chuckled with a ferocious gleam in his eyes.

Shaina observed him quietly. DeathMask tried hard to deal with the consequences of Hekate's attack. Restoring his humanity and with it the awareness of the deeds he had done had been an act of precisely calculated cruelty, and thus he seemed to be pretty unstable at the moment. Especially his mood swings were a bit unpredictable as he was torn between self-loathing and the wish to make amends and a renewed inclination to cruelty as if he wanted to refuse acknowledging that his former deeds might have been wrong. Nonetheless Shaina couldn't help but feel drawn to him. DeathMask was so unlike any of the other Saints, a fact she found strangely exciting.

"Shaina..." DeathMask savoured the sound of her name. It seemed to feel different

now that he didn't just consider her the Ophiuchus Silver Saint, a fellow warrior, but a woman. It was strange how one kiss had changed his perception of her completely. "I think I want to go out with you," he said hesitatingly. He wondered why this appeared to be much more difficult than it would have been to challenge her to a fight.

"You think?" Shaina couldn't stifle a grin.

"Don't mock me, woman!"

"You idiot crab," she said tenderly. "I'd love to go out with you."

"Really?"

"Really! What about if we freshen up a bit and meet in one or two hours to get something to eat?" During their fight against Persephoneia and her minions, the Saints had taken care not to eat anything in the underworld as that would have bound them irrevocably to Hades' Realm.

"This sounds like a good idea to me." DeathMask smiled. "What would you say if I'd cook something for us?" After everything he had gone through, the idea of some company appealed to him - something that astonished himself. He had always preferred his privacy - but at the moment the idea of dealing with his deeds and memories alone seemed hard to bear.

"*You* want to cook?" Shaina looked at him in surprise.

"Sure. You don't think I'm capable to do that?" It would help him put his mind to something pleasant.

"Truth be told, I wouldn't have expected this from you."

"Well, I rarely get invited, so I decided it might be best to learn how to cook for myself."

"Oh." Even though he said it lightly, Shaina noticed the loneliness underlying it. "If you like I could cook for you."

"Let's keep that in mind for, say, tomorrow?" That would be a very good reason to see her the next day, too, he thought.

Shaina blushed. "I'd love to."

"Then I'll expect you in my temple in about two hours. I hope you don't mind that it's still in some disrepair."

Shaina laughed. "Tell me about it." During the Hades War, Sanctuary had been mostly destroyed, and even though the repair work was well underway, it would still take some time until everything was fully in order again. "Okay, I'll be there!"

DeathMask gazed at her as she went away and admired her lithe figure and catlike grace. He wondered if he could convince her to stay the night, too. The idea that he would beat Milo in that respect, too, pleased him a lot, especially as Milo always bragged about being Sanctuary's best assassin and greatest womanizer. But he had to admit he liked Shaina indeed, even though he wasn't sure if it was more. Time would probably tell and for now he would simply enjoy her company. He hoped that this would help him cope with the damage Hekate had done.

Kapitel 2: Exploration

As soon as she had entered her hut, Shaina willed the Ophiuchus Cloth to leave her. It assembled and returned magically into the Cloth Box that was adorned with the symbol of Ophiuchus. She hoped that it would have enough time to heal before the the next battle as it had taken quite some damage in the fight with Persephoneia and her minions. With a sigh, she looked down at her normal clothing which was one of her lightly armoured outfits that she used in training, too. She pondered whether she had something in her clothes chest that wasn't armoured and for training. Well, there should be some light normal tunic somewhere at the bottom of the chest, she thought. But first she wanted to take a nice bath after all of the fights in the underworld.

When she was finally dressed again, she felt strangely excited at the thought that she would go to meet DeathMask - no, Angelo. If someone would have told her that before the fight against Persephoneia, she would have laughed right in their faces. But now she was looking forward to seeing him and she had this funny feeling in her stomach again.

Slowly she walked up the stairs towards Cancer Temple, relieved that she got unchallenged through Aries Temple. Kiki, or rather Aries Phrixos now, who was as gifted in psychic powers as his mentor Mu, probably would have seen through her in no time and then teased her from here to Jamir and back. But the little Lemurian Saint probably was either in Jamir studying with Shion or in the Kyoukou's Temple pestering Mu.

At Taurus Temple she wasn't that lucky. Aldebaran hadn't allowed himself any slack after the battle and was still - or more likely again - wearing his Gold Cloth, sitting on the stairs just in front of the entrance where he enjoyed the rays of the evening sun. As he discovered Shaina walking up the stairs, he was astonished to see her dressed in a simple dark blue tunic and lighter blue leggings with her yellow sash around the waist and not clad in her usual light leather armour.

"Good evening, Shaina. What business brings you here?" Politely he stood up and looked at her, marvelling that she appeared surprisingly feminine without her usual leather armour or Silver Cloth.

"I have an...appointment at Cancer Temple." Shaina mumbled.

"An appointment?" Aldebaran couldn't stifle a grin. Considering the fact that she was regarded as the toughest and fiercest of the female Saints, she was looking really cute at the moment with her flushed cheeks.

"Well, yes..."

"Since when is an appointment something to be embarrassed about? Or could it be that you wanted to say you have a date?"

Shaina's blush deepened. "It's not a date. DeathMask invited me for dinner," she defended herself.

Now Aldebaran couldn't contain his mirth any longer and broke into a good-natured laughter. "I see." He was slightly surprised that Shaina would date DeathMask, but they made up a team during the fight against Persephoneia, and maybe they had become somewhat closer then.

Shaina bristled at him. "Don't make fun of me!"

"But I don't, Shaina." He gave her a smile. Maybe she could work the miracle and turn DeathMask into a somewhat more sociable fellow. "You may pass. I don't want you to make him wait after all."

"Aldebaran!" She looked a bit scandalized at the Taurus Gold Saint and wondered if she was that obvious as she continued her way.

"Have fun," he shouted after her.

Shaina sighed and just hoped that neither Kanon nor Saga were at Gemini Temple right now. She definitely didn't feel like dealing with any of the twins right now.

Fortunately fate looked favourably at her this time and she could pass unhindered, but the closer she got to Cancer temple, the more apprehensive she got.

"Damn. I'm visiting Cancer DeathMask - so what?" she muttered aggressively to herself. But when she remembered their passionate kiss, she had the impression her legs turned to jelly.

Nonetheless she continued her way until she stood in front of the building. Only the inner part of the structure was rebuilt so far. The columns that normally adorned the front, back and sides of the temple were only partly restored and the decoration of the roof was missing, too.

Tentatively she entered the temple. The walls were all empty - the agonised faces of the dead that formerly covered them had dissolved after Shiryu killed the Cancer Saint during the battle of the 12 Temples, and obviously he hadn't collected any new victims since he had been revived by Gaia. Shaina was relieved when she saw this, as DeathMask's temple had creeped her out big time in the past.

As she walked inside, she noticed a very appetizing aroma of herbs and vegetables wafting through the building and she decided to follow her nose. Finally she reached the kitchen. The door was open and her heart beat faster when she saw DeathMask standing in front of a gas cooker, stirring the contents of a pan. He was clad in tight black jeans and a black shirt, and when he turned around she saw that he wore an apron adorned with a cute crab. He looked really striking even when he was not wearing his impressive Gold Cloth.

"Hello - Angelo..." Shaina blushed. It was still a bit odd to use his given name, but it felt better than the idea of calling him 'DeathMask'.

"Shaina." DeathMask smiled. If he was honest, he had feared that she wouldn't appear. But there she was and she was simply breathtakingly beautiful, he thought and marvelled at the fact that she was indeed interested in him when she had turned down every other man before. The idea that he would be the one to possess her pleased him greatly.

Shaina remained standing at the door as she just didn't know what he might expect of her. To her delight, DeathMask went to her, took her face in his hands and kissed her lingeringly, before he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. Shaina returned the kiss with passion. This felt just great, she thought, closed her eyes and simply enjoyed the experience. It was exciting to be held that way by his strong arms that could easily crush her - and this time she wasn't getting into conflict with his spiky Cancer Cloth.

Finally he let go of her again, and Shaina was a little disappointed. As he saw her mien, he chuckled. "I promised you a dinner and thus I should make sure it won't get burned. But we can always add some extra dessert." DeathMask hoped that she would decide to stay as he didn't know how he was able to cope with his memories when he tried to sleep. He caressed her cheek before he returned to the cooker and checked the content of the pan. "Um, sorry, it's not finished yet. The involtini need to stew a little longer. Why don't you sit down?"

Shaina just looked at him and wondered what was going on with her. Was this how Marin felt about Aiolia? The only thing she knew was that her current feelings had a totally different quality from what she had felt for Seiya before. She thought about the conviction that had been drilled into her by her teachers. "If a man sees you without your mask you only have two choices: to kill him or to love him!" As she couldn't kill Seiya she had thought she had no other choice but to love him - but these had been just empty words compared to the real thing, she had to admit now.

"Shaina?"

"Uh, yes - what?" she stammered and blushed again.

"A penny for your thoughts," DeathMask grinned.

"Er, better not..." Shaina's tint could easily compete with the colour of the fresh tomatoes in the bowl on the sideboard, especially as she had to admit to herself how much she felt drawn to him. Sit down? She felt more like going to him and touching him, caressing him, feeling him close to her. Shaina forced herself to take place and watched him handle the pots and pans expertly. Somehow she wouldn't have expected this from DeathMask, she thought, but she liked the idea.

Finally he put a tray with bruschetta onto the table, slices of roast Italian white bread with raw chopped tomatoes, basil, garlic and olive oil. "Buon appetito - help yourself!"

Shaina looked at him and smiled when she heard the Italian phrase. "Grazie, Angelo," she thanked him and took a slice of the bruschetta. "Hey that's yummy!" She finished two more of them.

"Just wait until you tried the involtini." DeathMask was a bit surprised that it was actually quite some fun to cook for someone who appreciated it. He took the involtini - roulades of veal filled with mixture of tomatoes, ricotta and sage - and the side dish of diced potatoes with herbs and olive oil out of the oven where he put them only some minutes before and served the meal.

"Wow, you are really good," she said in amazement after she tried the first bite. "I think I shall visit you more often if you always cook such tasty food!"

DeathMask laughed at her exclamation. "I hope you will visit me for other reasons, too."

"Well, I'd love to..." She looked at him, then averted her eyes and blushed again when she caught herself daydreaming about him. This was getting annoying, she thought, angry at herself. "Dammit! What did you do to me?" she said accusingly. DeathMask looked at her in confusion. What did he do?! Suddenly she got up and walked over to him. "Kiss me!" she demanded.

'I don't have to understand that, do I?' DeathMask pondered, but he was more than willing to fulfil her request. Finally they parted and Shaina gave him a dazzling smile before she returned to her place.

"Yes. This is definitely another reason."

'No, I definitely don't have to understand this. But I wouldn't mind an encore,' he thought as he watched her eat. He wondered if she expected some small talk now, but he didn't really know what to talk about. While he still pondered about a topic, he finished his meal and couldn't stop looking at her. The kiss had whetted his appetite for more.

"Why are you so silent?" Shaina wanted to know.

DeathMask sighed as he was ripped out of his reverie. "I fear I'm not really good at small talk."

"Is it because of this attack of Hekate's?"

"A bit, I guess." The memory was indeed painful, and he tried to suppress it forcefully now that it had resurfaced due to her question. He didn't want to deal with it if possible and closed his eyes as if to shut out everything that might remind him of the event.

Tentatively, Shaina stood up, went to him and ran her hand gently through his hair. When he felt the caress, DeathMask opened his eyes again and just looked at her while he enjoyed the sensation. Finally he pulled her onto his lap and held her close as

her warm presence seemed to chase away the painful memories.

"Stay with me tonight."

"Don't you think that's a little fast?" Shaina rested her head against his shoulder and had to admit she was sorely tempted.

"Fast? There could be a new battle tomorrow and who knows if we would survive that. Shouldn't we just enjoy ourselves while we can?" He stroked her back.

His touch sent shivers down her spine and she wondered how it would feel if he would explore all of her body. She put her arms around his neck and looked into his deep blue eyes. Somehow he had a point there, she thought and couldn't resist kissing him again.

"Was that a 'yes'?"

"It was an *I'm thinking about it*." Shaina couldn't understand herself. It had been only a couple of hours since she admitted to herself she had fallen in love with him and now she already burned to spend the night with him? "You should realise that this is a once in a lifetime gift for me..."

"I do realise this." His lips met hers again. "But I don't want to sleep alone tonight."

"I told you that I want you to prove to me that you love me." But she felt her resistance crumble.

"You are pretty demanding."

"You'll get me if you can convince me, so you have to make a proper effort." As little incentive she kissed him again.

"Well, I can promise you that I'll keep on trying to make you give in to me. Wouldn't that count as some effort, too?" He grinned and continued to caress her. Playfully he nibbled at her earlobe and worked his way along the side of her neck to her shoulder. When she sighed contentedly, he began to tug at her sash.

"Hey, what are you doing there?"

"Trying to unpack this nice present here that doesn't cease to tease me."

"Angelo..." Yet she didn't resist when he unknotted the sash, slid his hands under her tunic and explored her soft curves. On the contrary, she caught herself moving towards his caresses.

"So what do you say now?" He buried his face in her hair. She smelled good, he thought, and she felt good, too.

"Dammit, don't stop," she whispered and cursed herself for her weakness. But then,

she had to admit she was curious, too, and so she tugged at his shirt to do some exploration of her own. DeathMask chuckled and helped her strip it off. Shaina marvelled at his perfectly formed muscles and traced them with her fingers. Gods, she wanted him, too!

"Let's make ourselves a bit more comfortable," he suggested, his hands disappearing under her tunic again and stroking her back.

"Okay." Shaina knew that there was no way back then, but she had made her decision now. DeathMask smiled and kissed her again, before he got up, effortlessly lifting her onto his arms. She rested her head against his shoulder and gently stroked his bare chest while he carried her deeper into the living space of his temple.

Finally they arrived at his bedroom, and Shaina was surprised that it looked pretty comfy. It was definitely more luxurious than her hut with a thick black carpet and a comfortable looking bed with dark blue bedding.

"You really have it nice here in your temple," she commented. The dark colours suited him.

"Well, there should be some advantages to being a Gold Saint," DeathMask said cheerfully, put her down and sat down next to her, appraising her lithe and very shapely figure that was still covered with too much cloth. He untied the lacings of her shoes and removed them, running his hands slowly along her legs and body until he reached her face. "You are beautiful."

Shaina smiled at him. "You don't look too bad either." She sat up and admired his powerful physique, tracing the contours of the muscles on his chest and abdomen with her fingertips.

"You have an unfair advantage," he grinned and slowly pushed up her tunic. Shaina blushed when he bared her bosom and cupped her breasts with his hands. DeathMask found her reaction cute and kissed her, before he assisted her to strip off the tunic completely. He was delighted that she had given in after all - and so far she seemed to enjoy the intimacy.

To his surprise he discovered that this was the first time he really cared for someone again since he had become a Gold Saint. It was a somewhat confusing realisation - until now it had been his greatest joy to see people cower in fear, to cause bloodshed, kill and fight. And now he felt deeply content to hold this woman in his arms and bring her pleasure, not pain? A bit worried, he listened to his feelings, but when he found that he still couldn't stand Shiryu and would like to see him suffer some miserable fate and die preferably sooner than later, he was relieved. He could tolerate being nice to one person, but more would effectively ruin his reputation.

However, he wanted Shaina to have a pleasurable experience, so that she would desire to stay with him. The drawback of causing people pain was that it usually didn't incite them to return - unless they were masochists which would be boring. But he wanted that Shaina longed to be with him.

"Angelo? What are you thinking about?" Shaina looked curiously at him.

"You." He kicked off his shoes and laid down next to her, pulling her into his embrace. Absently he stroked her back and relished her warmth. Somehow this was a completely different experience than the one-night stands he'd had with girls from the surrounding villages. Those hadn't known anything about him and if they would have learned that he was the assassin of Sanctuary who had killed countless victims and even delighted in doing so, they would have run away in horror. Shaina on the other hand knew that he was the Cancer Gold Saint and she also knew what he had done in the past and would continue to do. And still she wanted to be with him.

Shaina looked at him and was surprised how relaxed and even gentle he appeared right now. She smiled and caressed his cheek. She would have been content just to lie there, listening to his heartbeat and feeling his arms around her, but obviously he wanted more as his hands wandered downwards and followed the contours of her body.

"You have quite some tantalising curves," he commented, and Shaina couldn't help blushing again, especially when he slowly pushed down her leggings, caressing her legs in the process. Even though she felt unaccustomedly exposed, she helped him strip off the garment, internally torn between apprehension and curiosity. Unfortunately her curiosity became the better of her and she started to tug at his trousers.

"Now it's your turn, too!" she demanded. DeathMask chuckled and placed her next to him. He really liked what he saw and kissed her once more before he undressed. Shaina observed him with great interest. He was indeed nicely built in all respects. "So this is supposed to fit into me?" she asked, somewhat sceptically.

"Well, yes, that's the general idea." DeathMask couldn't stifle a grin and began to gently stroke her again. It pleased him how she reacted to his fondling. Shaina shivered in anticipation, but suddenly something else came to her mind.

"Angelo, before you go on, let me warn you... If you think you can sleep with me just to brag around that you spent the night with me, then I will see to it that you will not be able to stick *this* anywhere else again. If you sleep with me now, this means a serious long-term commitment for you. Did I make myself clear?" Shaina smiled sweetly and dug her fingernails with slight pressure into his flesh.

"Um, absolutely clear..." DeathMask was taken aback how much he desired her. He wanted her. He wanted her because she was the strongest of the female Saints and because she dared to stand up to him. And yet she had a surprisingly soft and passionate side, too, what she proved by kissing him when she heard his answer. "But I hope you don't mind if I brag around when I stay with you?" he said with a grin.

"You evil man!"

"Caught," he said cheerfully and ran his hands over her soft skin, touching her most

sensitive spots. It was amazing, he thought, she didn't just return his caresses with her body, but also her mind. Her Cosmo - strong for a Silver Saint - flared up and merged with his, supported by his powerful empathic ability, and their thoughts mingled as well, giving him the perfect feedback what she liked best and what he had to do to make her give in to him completely. DeathMask smiled when he saw himself reflected in her eyes - and her thoughts were really flattering. He couldn't remember when he last felt so relaxed and he realised that he truly liked the idea of staying with her, feeling her close to him.

But this mental connection wasn't a one way street and so she also got glimpses of his thought-world which currently were centered very much on her and what he intended to do with her right now. Shaina flushed, but it would have been a lie to say that the images didn't turn her on. And it wasn't just his imagination, but also what he did with his hands and mouth. When he finally entered her, she was so aroused that the short pain was immediately smothered by this incredible sensation of him moving inside of her. It didn't take long and they climaxed together, their minds still joined just like their bodies.

For a while they just relished their closeness and DeathMask pondered about the unexpected sharing of their thoughts and emotions. He had never experienced something like this before - but then, the women with whom he slept before hadn't been Saints who had access to their Cosmo. Somewhat unexpectedly he felt a sharp pain in his back as Shaina's fingernails dug deeply into his flesh.

"Ouch!"

"Hey! I wanted to tell you that this was just wonderful, but now you are thinking about your exploits with other women?" she said poutily.

He looked apologetically at her and discovered that it had some disadvantages, too, that they were still linked with their minds. But the advantages outweighed them by far as the mind-shared love-making had been amazing. "I just pondered that I have never experienced something like this before - and I have to admit I would love to repeat it. So you don't have to worry about any former 'exploits' - you are the only one for me from now on!" He was a bit surprised at himself when he realised that he really meant it, but he would be a fool if he would let her go again.

Shaina smiled. The emotions that accompanied his words through the still upheld mind link assured her that he was sincere, at least for now. "Very well. I guess I can let you get away with this." She still had her legs wrapped around his hips and didn't want to release him yet. "After all, this was just wonderful." She kissed him passionately. The rest of the night was spent likewise enjoyable until they decided to finally replenish their energies and sleep.

Kapitel 3: Reflexion

When Shaina awoke that morning she wondered for a moment if the events of this night had been just a wonderful dream, but the soft breathing in her neck and the strong arm wrapped about her told her otherwise. She almost didn't believe that she was now together with DeathMask and even less that she felt completely secure and content in his arms.

Her movements awakened DeathMask who couldn't remember when he had last slept so well, even before Hekate's punishment. It seemed to him that Shaina truly managed to drive away all bad memories, and he realised that he wanted her to stay by his side. He gave her a kiss on the nape of her neck.

"Buon giorno, tesoro."

"Eh, you're scratchy," she complained.

"That happens in the mornings. Scusi." He laid down on his back and grinned, obviously not sorry at all.

"Morning? Uh-oh. That reminds me - I have to go... I have to take care of my trainees."

"Really?" He looked a bit disappointed. Shaina turned around and kissed him, scratchy or not, before she rested her head on his chest.

"Really. How does it look when the teacher comes too late? Speaking of late - what time is it anyway?"

DeathMask closed his eyes and tuned in to his constellation. As he was always aware of its position in the sky, he could exactly determine the time through it. "Half past nine."

"Half past nine?" Shaina looked at him in shock. "That's way after sunrise!"

"Sì," he said cheerfully and held her close.

"Hey, I have to go now! It's all your fault that I overslept!"

"All mine?" he chuckled. "I remember that you participated very actively, too."

Shaina blushed. "It just felt so good," she defended herself and nestled to him. And to be honest, she wouldn't mind an encore at all, even though she felt somewhat tender at the moment.

"Well, then do your duty. But I'll expect you here again right after your training session."

"You *expect* me here? Don't you think you should ask me if I would like to visit you again?"

"Look into my eyes and tell me you don't want to drop by tonight." He smiled at her and caressed her where he knew she liked it best. The unexpected mind-link they shared yesterday had given him some useful insights he could nicely exploit.

"You *are* evil," she sighed and pitied the fact that she really needed to leave now.

"With pleasure," he grinned, but let her go now and put his hands behind his head while he watched her dress. When she was finished, she went to him to give him a final kiss, before she left.

"I'll be back tonight," she promised. "But I expect that you aren't scratchy anymore then, Angelo!" She gave him a stern look, and DeathMask couldn't help grinning again.

Now she had to return to her hut first to freshen up and dress in her training outfit before she could get to her students. She was coming horribly late, she thought reproachfully. Hopefully Silvina had taken over for her, but she was going to face some curious questions about her whereabouts as they would certainly have checked for her in her hut.

* * *

Again she passed through Gemini Temple without running into Saga or Kanon. At this time of the day they might be already in the training area of Sanctuary. Unfortunately this wasn't true of Aldebaran.

"Hello Shaina," the Taurus Gold Saint greeted her with a broad grin. "It seems your ...appointment took longer than expected?"

Shaina flushed visibly. "It's not..." She stopped. She wanted to say 'It's not the way you think it is,' but unfortunately it very likely was the way he thought it was, and she wasn't exactly good at lying anyway. "Yeah, sort of," she conceded, somewhat embarrassed.

"You okay?" Aldebaran scrutinised her and noticed that she wasn't wearing her sash anymore. She appeared a bit rattled, and he was slightly worried.

"Huh?" Shaina suddenly realised what he wanted to imply. "No, Angel- er, DeathMask, didn't do anything untoward." Her blush deepened when she recalled the passion of the night. "Well, as a matter of fact, he did," she said somewhat dreamily, "but I... Damn!" If it had been possible, her face would have gotten even redder. "Forget what I just said right away!" she demanded. "We just spent a very nice evening together."

Now Aldebaran couldn't help but burst out in a big, hearty, booming laughter. "If you want to be discreet about it, you'd better tell him not to decorate your throat with love bites. And by the way, you forgot your sash in his temple."

"Aldebaran, please remind me to kill you the next time we meet - unfortunately I'm in a bit of a hurry at the moment..." Shaina touched her throat and cursed the fact that she had not taken the time to look into a mirror before she left.

"I'm sure you two make a lovely couple," the huge Taurus Saint said, still grinning broadly.

Shaina shot him a withering glance and jogged down the stairs towards her hut. She definitely needed a shower and wanted to get into her training clothes.

* * *

Shaina indulged in an extensive shower while her thoughts continued to revolve around the last night. She still couldn't understand why she had given in to him so readily, but then, she didn't regret it in the least.

Finally she rubbed herself down and changed into her light armour, wrapping a spare yellow sash around her waist.

"Shaina?" a well-known female voice asked.

'Uh-oh,' the Ophiuchus Saint thought. "Yes, Marin?"

"Where have you been? Silvina took over the training for now."

"Well, I sort of overslept." Shaina decided to brew some coffee. She was already late, so another ten or so minutes wouldn't hurt either. "Want a cappuccino, too?"

"Yes, please. - So, you weren't at home and you overslept... Don't tell me you were together with Milo?"

Shaina looked scandalised to Marin. "Not in this life!" When she turned towards the red-haired Saint, the other woman spotted the tell-tale red mark at the side of her throat. Marin giggled.

"Is that what I think it is?"

Shaina blushed. "Yes." She placed a cup of cappuccino in front of her fellow Saint and Marin put down her mask.

"Thanks. - So who is it?"

Shaina smiled. "The most wonderful man in the world. Strong, handsome, affectionate, gentle, passionate - and he can cook as well."

"I want a name!" Marin wondered who this could be. "Wait, is it Shura?" The Capricorn Saint was known to be a great cook.

Shaina shook her head. "Nope."

"Aldebaran?" That would account for the 'strong' and 'gentle'.

"No."

"Now I'm really getting curious." Marin ruled out Aphrodite as he wasn't interested in women as far as she knew, Aiolia was definitely off-limits, and Camus was so cold all the time, there she could neither see the passionate nor gentle part. Shaka certainly wasn't interested in anyone else but himself and Saga, DeathMask and Kanon didn't exactly fit the description either. Aiolos couldn't cook for the life of him, but somehow she didn't see Mu or Dohko as viable options either. "Is it one of the Silver Saints?"

"No. It's -- DeathMask." She almost said 'Angelo', but caught herself just in time.

"Just a moment, short reality check - are we talking about the same person?" Marin stared incredulously at her friend. "I'm talking of Cancer Gold Saint DeathMask, renowned as excessively cruel and callous assassin and as a sadist..."

"Well, he showed me a very different side of himself yesterday. He even told me his real name, but he said he'd kill me if I'd tell it to anyone else." She laughed.

"Okay, that does sound at least somewhat like him." Marin lifted her eyebrows. "So he actually has another name? And he did tell it to you?"

"Yes. And it suits him." Shaina smiled again and seemed to be aglow with happiness.

"You really are in love with him!" Marin was perplexed.

"Yes." Shaina's cheeks showed a vividly red colour. "I even decided to spend the night with him."

"Are you sure that was a good idea?"

"I absolutely don't regret it, if that's what you mean. Anyway, I told him he'd be a dead man if he would consider our night together as anything else than the beginning of a long-term relationship, and I got the impression he understood."

"Wow. I'm not sure I would have dared to talk to DeathMask that way..."

"Well, I don't mind if he's a Gold Saint or not." In the fight against Poseidon she even dared to challenge the god of the sea on her own, so she certainly wouldn't fear to take on a Gold Saint if need be. "I told him my conditions, he agreed, and thus he is mine now."

Marin laughed. "I bet he was impressed. He values strength and courage, after all. But now you have to tell me everything! Like - he really knows how to cook? I would never have imagined that."

"Neither did I. But he told me he never gets invited, so he had to make do on his own."

"As sad as it sounds, it is understandable. He's not exactly someone one would feel comfortable around - or so I thought." Marin still doubted Shaina's sanity. DeathMask of all men...

"I discovered he's quite different in his private domain - he was really affectionate and gentle." Shaina wondered how much of this was due to his run-in with Hekate in the underworld, though.

"Affectionate and gentle? Now these are definitely no adjectives I would have expected in connection with DeathMask!"

"To be honest - before yesterday I would have agreed with you."

"But now confess - how is he in bed?"

"Marin!" Shaina look scandalised at her, then she blushed again. "Well, I don't really have any possibility of comparison, but I thought he was just wonderful."

"Wait, this really was your first time?"

"Come on, don't tell me you believed the rubbish Milo told about him and me?"

"True, you always denied that anything happened there, but then, Milo can be very convincing..."

"Marin, don't tell me he managed to seduce you?" Shaina stared at her friend.

"Almost. But then I thought about Aiolia and escaped."

"Wise decision."

"Indeed. - But now back to you... So how was it?"

"You are nosy, Marin! Well, I didn't expect it to be so wonderful, I have to admit. He was so gentle and passionate... But then, he cheated. He read my mind to figure out what I liked. No wonder I just couldn't resist him..."

"It sounds as if you were very lucky there."

"I'm really looking forward to being with him again." Shaina smiled. "But I think I should get to the training place now."

"You might want to wear a scarf, though, or you will have to answer more curious questions."

"True." Shaina dug out a scarf of the same colour of her sash and wrapped it around her throat, completely covering the red mark DeathMask left on her. She simply

would be doubly hard on her students so that they wouldn't get any funny ideas.

* * *

After Shaina had left, DeathMask decided to get up as well. He was in a perfectly good mood and even more so as she had promised to drop in after training, too. He still couldn't believe his luck - many of the Gold Saints admired the two only female Silver Saints, but the Aquila Saint had chosen Aiolia, while Shaina's choices were never clear until yesterday. And now she was his!

He went into the bathroom and showered. As there were some hot springs in the vicinity, at least the temples of the Gold Saints and the Pope were equipped with running hot water. Today there wasn't any meeting due at the Pope's Temple, so he left his Cancer Cloth in favour of the light training armour that was the usual outfit in Sanctuary, although his was completely black and not the common shades of brown most others wore. Finally he was ready, shaved and his hair styled properly, too.

When he went into the kitchen for some coffee, it recurred to him that they left the kitchen without tidying up the day before. He sighed and began to clear the mess of used pans and leftovers. On the floor he discovered a yellow stripe of cloth, and he smiled when he picked it up and put it onto one of the kitchen chairs. He finished cleaning everything, before he decided to go down to the training area.

DeathMask was looking forward to meeting Milo as he wanted to confront the Scorpio Gold Saint about the rubbish he had claimed about himself and Shaina. On impulse he took Shaina's sash and tucked it into his belt. He absolutely wanted to see Milo's face when he showed him this 'trophy'.

He walked down the stairs. Neither Kanon nor Saga were in their Temple - probably Saga spent his time in the spa at the Pope's Temple as ever so often, and Kanon might be training and/or flirting with the girls.

When he reached Taurus Temple, Aldebaran seemed to be waiting for him already. His position as guardian of the second Temple gave the Taurus Gold Saint a very good insight into all things concerning the Gold Saints as everybody had to pass his Temple on the way up or down and he was one of the few Gold Saints who liked to stay there most of the time.

"Hello DeathMask! You look exceptionally happy today."

"Hm? Oh, Aldebaran." DeathMask caught himself that he was indeed grinning contentedly as his thoughts had returned to Shaina and the passion of the last night. "Well, I am happy, I have to admit."

"Could it be that a certain female Silver Saint is the reason for your current state of bliss?"

"I should have expected that she wouldn't pass here unnoticed."

"So you really are together with Shaina now?"

"Yeah, I guess so." DeathMask was loathe to reveal much of his personal life, but on the other hand, he wanted to make it clear for everybody that Shaina was now off-limits as she belonged to him.

"You guess so?" Aldebaran lifted his bushy eyebrows in amusement.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, she is mine now, and it seems she wants to stay with me too."

"So you are indeed serious about this. I'm glad to hear that. Shaina doesn't deserve to be used as plaything."

"I agree. And that's why I will have a little talk with Milo now."

"What did he do?"

"He caused Shaina quite some distress, and I will see to it that he will never do that again." And of course he wanted to make it very clear to Milo that the Scorpio Saint had lost to him.

Aldebaran smiled. Now this was definitely a first - DeathMask actually caring for someone else but himself. "Then I should better not delay you any longer. Till later!"

DeathMask gave him a nod and continued downstairs. To his relief, Aries Temple was still empty. Kiki would certainly not have missed to make fun of him.

When he reached the training area, the people eyed him fearfully as usual. His reputation as merciless assassin of Sanctuary still held, even though there hadn't been any such jobs since Gaia revived him and the other Saints after the defeat of Hades. Somehow he felt a bit underused.

Finally, he discovered Milo who was training in a corner on his own. He went to the Scorpio Saint who also wore a light leather armour at the moment. "Hey, Milo."

"DeathMask?" Milo put on a frown. What did the crab want from him? Normally he gave him a wide berth as they didn't like each other at all, and so he didn't think the Cancer Saint showed up here just for some casual conversation.

"I demand you take back your claim that there was something between you and Shaina," DeathMask said with a dangerous glint in his eyes and without bothering about any introductory niceties. Milo was taken aback. This was certainly nothing he had expected.

"Why should I do that?" Moreover, of what interest was this for DeathMask?

"Because I know it wasn't true and because I don't like you implying that she's a slut."

"Why are you suddenly so interested in Shaina?" Milo inquired, but suddenly it dawned to him. "Just a moment - you cannot want to suggest that you and Shaina..." He had the impression someone pulled the rug out from under him. So far he had been confident that it was only a matter of time until she would give in to him after all. But this would mean...

"Suggest? Shaina is my woman now and you will stay away from her and refrain from spreading any insubstantial claims." DeathMask looked coldly at the Scorpio Saint.

"And what makes you think it was an insubstantial claim?" Milo was proud of his numerous conquests, so the fact that Shaina always turned him down had rankled him so much that he simply decided to spread the rumour, especially as she seemed to be more or less together with Aiolia who had Marin, too.

"The simple fact that she was still a virgin when I slept with her." DeathMask grinned triumphantly at Milo who appeared thunderstruck. Now this was definitely unexpected - both the fact that she had been inexperienced and that she had given in to DeathMask when she had refused him, Milo.

"You actually..." Milo still stared incredulously at the Cancer Saint..

"Yes. I told you she's my woman now." DeathMask played nonchalantly with her sash. "And I don't intend to give her up again."

"And Shaina agrees with you on this?" Milo didn't want to believe that.

"She does." DeathMask couldn't help but smile at the thought that it was originally Shaina who demanded that he stay with her. "And that's why you are to leave her alone now."

"I think it should be Shaina's privilege to decide if she doesn't want anything from me."

"If you insist?" DeathMask smiled cruelly. It would be amusing to see Milo's reaction when Shaina showed him where she belonged now. He sent a telepathic call to her as even he didn't want to trespass into the training grounds of the female warriors.

It didn't take long, and Shaina appeared. She ignored Milo as she did most of the time since he spread the rumours of their alleged liaison and gave DeathMask an irritated glare. "Didn't I tell you that I have duties to perform?" To her dismay, she had this funny feeling in her stomach again when she saw him, and it was difficult for her to keep up her angry mien.

When Milo heard this, he grinned contentedly. Obviously she wasn't as fond of DeathMask as he claimed, he thought.

"Yeah, you did. But I wanted to see you anyway." DeathMask smiled at her and caught her in his arms even though she appeared so infuriated. Milo's jaw dropped when he witnessed this, and even more so as the crab didn't get thunder clawed for his move -

on the contrary, suddenly Shaina stood on her toes, pulled him down to her and kissed him passionately.

"Nice - you're not scratchy anymore," she finally commented with a smile and caressed his cheek. Then she turned around and looked at Milo as if she had only now seen him. "Oh, hello Milo."

"Shaina! You can't be serious that you chose that crab over me!" Milo said disbelievingly.

"Why not?" She leaned against DeathMask who stood behind her, his arms still wrapped possessively around her. "I want a man for a serious relationship and not one where I'd be just a number in his row of conquests."

"And what makes you think that he is a man for a serious relationship?"

"I know it." Shaina smiled and stroked DeathMask's forearms. Since their mind link, she was pretty sure about him. "But what business of yours is that anyway?"

Milo huffed.

"Any further questions?" DeathMask grinned triumphantly at Milo.

"And this was the reason why you had to drag me away from my trainees?" Shaina turned towards DeathMask again and gave him another angry glare. He should know that she took her duties very seriously.

"Si." She looked cute when she was irritated, DeathMask thought and couldn't withstand the temptation to kiss her once more.

"You idiot crab," she said tenderly and snuggled against him while cursing her inability to resist him. "Unfortunately I really have to return to my duties now."

"But remember, I expect to see you tonight."

"Try to hold me back."

"I think I'm getting sick," Milo said in disgust and teleported away.

"I wonder how long it will keep this time before he tries to go after me again," Shaina sighed.

"I can still kill him for you."

"You mean you'd get into one of these legendary 1000 day wars and I wouldn't be able to see you for all that time? No way!" She smiled at him. "But that's really sweet of you." She gave him a last kiss and returned to her trainees.

DeathMask looked after her and still marveled at the fact that she obviously wanted

him as much as he wanted her. As a Saint he knew that every day could bring a battle in which he might perish - or she as well - but he vowed he would hold on to this happiness that he had never known before for as long as it was possible.

Kapitel 4: Revelation

He really could get used to this, DeathMask thought when he awoke the next morning with Shaina snuggled up to him, smiling contentedly in her sleep. He caressed her soft skin and she woke up from his touch and the affectionate "Buon giorno, tesoro!" he whispered into her ear.

"Angelo," she sighed and enjoyed his warmth and closeness, before she started. "Please don't tell me we overslept again," she said, more amused than regretful.

"I didn't oversleep. *You* are the one who wanted to get up early."

"You are both lazy and pleasure-seeking - and I'm the one who has to take the blame!" she accused him, but didn't make any attempt to leave his embrace.

"Sì." DeathMask nibbled playfully at her earlobe, but suddenly he sensed a Saint's Cosmo approaching. "Unfortunately I just felt someone who wants to pass through my temple," he remarked with a slight frown. He would have preferred to keep up their cosy togetherness a little longer.

Shaina closed her eyes and concentrated, then she couldn't suppress a chuckle. "It seems we weren't the only ones who spent a very enjoyable night. But I guess this means I should get up after all now."

"If you insist." He would just as soon that she stay with him, of course. But if he had to get up anyway... "Maybe I should intercept this impudent trespasser who disturbed our snugly morning - um, could you tell me where my trousers have disappeared to?" he wondered when he looked around and didn't see them anywhere on the floor around the bed.

"Somewhere between the kitchen and your bedroom, I guess." Shaina couldn't help but giggle when DeathMask decided to wrap a blanket around his middle. "Do you really think this will intimidate the 'impudent trespasser'?" she asked. But he was looking very yummy that way. With a slightly disappointed sigh she got up as well.

"It's a matter of principle - I can't have people sneak through my temple unchallenged." He stepped into the hall, only moderately menacing in his current get up, but he knew that Shaina would refuse to kiss him good-bye if he wore his spiky Cancer Cloth. "Hello Marin, do you think you can weasel through my domain without me noticing?"

When the Aquila Saint heard DeathMask's voice, she expected him to block her way, but certainly not wrapped in just a blanket that didn't hide his magnificent physique.

"Wow," she said approvingly, then giggled. "I hope I didn't disturb you while you did something important."

Shaina had managed to find most of her clothes in the meantime, put them on and stepped into the hall, too. "We wanted to get up anyway," she said and wrapped her arms possessively around DeathMask's middle. "Good morning, Marin."

"Good Morning, Shaina. So you're really serious about being with DeathMask?"

"Absolutely serious."

DeathMask smiled at Shaina, lifted her chin with his hand and kissed her tenderly.

Marin observed this with astonishment. Obviously her friend hadn't exaggerated when she claimed that DeathMask could be gentle and affectionate.

They exchanged some endearments in Italian - at least Marin suspected this from their tone of voice, before Shaina let go of DeathMask. "I'm sorry, I really need to leave now."

"Unfortunately..."

He looked so disappointed that Shaina couldn't help but kiss him once more even though she found he needed a shave. "Ciao tesoro mio."

Marin raised an eyebrow in amusement behind her silver mask. "No wonder you were so late yesterday," she commented.

Shaina blushed. "Yeah. And that's why I definitely have to leave *now* or I might reconsider." She gave DeathMask a final kiss and turned to Marin. "Let's go."

"Don't forget, I expect you here again tonight," DeathMask called after her.

"How could I forget that?"

Marin grinned under her mask. "If I hadn't seen this I probably wouldn't have believed it," she said when they were on their way downstairs.

"I told you he's the most wonderful man in the world. And what makes it even better - he's all mine."

"Don't worry - I have my own most wonderful man in the world," Marin assured her.

"Good."

* * *

It didn't take long until they reached Gemini temple, and for once one of the twins was there - Kanon, who looked not really awake yet when he greeted the Silver Saints.

"Good Morning, Kanon!" both Marin and Shaina chimed good-humouredly and in unison.

"How can you be so cheerful that early in the morning," the younger Gemini Saint complained and yawned infernally.

"Somehow I don't think you really want to know," Shaina grinned.

"Sure I want to know. I want to be as cheery as you are!"

Marin and Shaina exchanged a look and laughed. "You have to find yourself someone else to play with. We're definitely not going to lend you either of our men."

"Your men? I know that you are together with Aiolia, Marin - but who's the lucky bastard who got you, Shaina? Milo?"

Shaina glared at Kanon. "Why do all people think that I'm in any way interested in Milo?"

"Because he says so?"

"Maybe I should kill him after all," Shaina muttered angrily.

"So who else is it? It can't be Mu, Aldebaran, or my brother, considering the direction where you came from. And with Aiolia and Milo out as well and Dohko at Rozan..."

"If you really want to know - it's DeathMask."

"Wow, that's unexpected."

"I didn't expect it either, but now I don't want to imagine being with anyone else but him." Shaina's mien softened visibly when she talked about the crab, Kanon discovered in surprise.

"Well, well... So much for Milo's perfect score when it comes to the conquest of the fair sex," Kanon grinned.

"You bet his score is far worse than he tries to make you believe," Marin laughed.

"Does that mean you can contribute some stories, too?"

"No comment." The grin was heard, if not seen in Marin's statement.

"This slowly makes me wonder how many of Milo's alleged conquests hold true after some careful examination," Kanon pondered.

"Well, I heard from a trustworthy source that one of Milo's conquests turned out to be Aphrodite who disguised as cute girl and set up our dear Scorpio."

"Really?" Kanon almost died from laughter. "That's a good one!"

"Indeed," Shaina agreed. "But we should move on now. I really want a shower now."

"Better make it a cold one," Kanon grinned.

"Want a Thunder Claw?"

"No so early in the morning. I prefer a coffee at this time."

Marin and Shaina exchanged a look, shook their heads and continued downstairs.

Of course they got into a chat with Aldebaran, but Phrixos was still nowhere to be seen. Soon after they had freshened up and took care of their trainees, albeit a little late again.

* * *

DeathMask was tidying up the kitchen of his temple, when Aphrodite walked in. The beautiful Pisces Saint was the only one who dared enter Cancer Temple without announcing himself and got away with it unscathed.

"Okay, Angelo, now tell me the name of the alien that took over your body!"

"Huh?" DeathMask looked blankly at Aphrodite.

"What happened to you in the Underworld? You didn't seem to be yourself since we met there in the halls of Persephoneia."

DeathMask looked at the only person he considered a friend among the Gold Saints. "I'm not sure how to explain it..." He stowed away the dishes and glasses and looked around. Everything was tidy again. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Sure." Aphrodite sat down at the table in the kitchen and waited while DeathMask brewed a pot of coffee. He observed the Cancer Saint closely. Something was definitely odd about the man.

DeathMask brought two mugs of coffee and put them down. "There you go - black like the night."

Aphrodite smiled. "Thank you. And now I'd like to know what happened. And with that I don't mean that you slept with Shaina - oh, come on, you can't believe I haven't heard of that even though I'm living high up there in the 12th temple."

DeathMask took a sip of his coffee that he drank with a shot of milk. "What happened... This is connected with the day I attained Gold Saint rank. There was ...something that happened and I never knew about it until Hekate undid the memory block that I received that day."

Aphrodite listened with great interest. He had first met DeathMask before they were sent to their training places to win their Gold Cloths. When he arrived at Sanctuary,

only Aiolos and Saga had been there for longer, while Shura and DeathMask had arrived a few months earlier. At that time, DeathMask was still Angelo, a slightly cocky, but also ambitious young boy. When they met over a year later, clad in their golden armours, Angelo was no more. He insisted on being called DeathMask and showed no sign of compassion anymore. Maybe now he would learn which events had led to this change.

"During my Test of Cloth, there was an ...accident..." DeathMask frowned. Accident? Not really, but then, the Ara Saint certainly didn't want things to happen that way. "I have been trained by both the Eridanus Saint and the Ara Saint, as their powers also enable them to interact with spirits and Yomotsu Hirasaka, the limbo that is the forecourt to the Hades." DeathMask took another sip of coffee. "During my test, the Eridanus Saint was killed, and Ara Lethe acted without thinking and attacked me with her most powerful move, the Wave of Oblivion. This attack can delete or suppress parts of the memory of the victim. In my case she managed to suppress my humanity completely."

Aphrodite's eyes widened with horror. Now he could finally understand why DeathMask had never shown any remorse for his deeds.

"Well, and not only that - I also forgot what happened to me and only remembered that I had trained here to become a Gold Saint. Oh, sure, I still retained my memories from my childhood, but it seems the Wave of Oblivion also wiped away many of the values I had been taught by Eridanus Charon, too." DeathMask's voice appeared almost toneless. Now that he told Aphrodite about the events, it finally sank in to him what had happened then - and the empty life that he led until Hekate undid the Wave of Oblivion.

"Angelo?" Aphrodite chose to use DeathMask's real name again. He was the only person allowed to use it still, and he usually did so when he wanted to talk seriously with him. "I'm not going to ask whether you are okay when I can clearly see that you aren't - but is there anything I can do to help?"

DeathMask swallowed and put on a tentative smile. "But you already do. Thank you for listening."

Aphrodite raised an eyebrow. Normally DeathMask would have coldly told him where to stick his concern. "You know I always listened to you." The Pisces Saint sighed inwardly. Except for him no one actually bothered to talk to DeathMask, but the Cancer Saint had never been too social. Sometimes Aphrodite didn't understand why he even tried to keep up with him, but on the other hand, DeathMask dealt with him normally even after he confessed to him that he was interested in guys and that he took a liking to him. The Cancer Saint just told him "Sorry, I don't swing that way." and that was it. When somewhat later he had made a move on Shura, the Capricorn was horrified and since then preferred to give him a wide berth.

"I know." DeathMask clung to his mug of coffee.

"But that wasn't the full story yet, right?"

"Indeed. Everything unraveled when I ran into Hekate and challenged her during the battle with Persephoneia. As Hekate is a Goddess - a fact I didn't realise at first - she managed to sift through my memories and found this weak spot of mine even though I myself didn't remember. She obviously thought it was amusing to undo this Wave of Oblivion - and now I have to deal with everything that happened. Fortunately I had Shaina at my side. She forced me to go on."

"And that's why you decided you want her as your girl-friend?"

DeathMask frowned. "Well, she told me she fell in love with me. But I... I don't know yet."

"You don't know?"

"I'm just not sure if I could call it love. She *is* beautiful, she is the strongest of the female Saints, she is great to be around, she managed to push away all of my bad memories, but..."

"You have never been in love before?" Aphrodite was tempted to tousle DeathMask's hair, but refrained from it as he suspected he would not react positively to the touch.

The Cancer Saint shook his head. "No."

Aphrodite pondered. "So how can we make sure... Tell me, do you look forward to seeing her again?"

"Sure." DeathMask smiled at the thought of holding her in his arms again.

"And what would you do if you saw some one else kiss he-"

"I'd kill him!!"

"Okay..." Aphrodite blinked. That came fast. "How would you feel about kissing the most beautiful girl in the world instead of Shaina?"

"But she *is* the most beautiful girl in the world!"

Aphrodite grinned. "Angelo, you can deny it as much as you want. I think you *are* in love with her."

"Really?"

"Really."

"You think I should tell her?"

"If you don't you are an even greater idiot than normally." Aphrodite finished his coffee. "Could I have another one, please?"

"Sure." DeathMask fetched the pot and poured Aphrodite another cup, before he filled his own mug, too. "I still can't believe that she really loves me."

"Oh, / can," Aphrodite sighed. He still found DeathMask very attractive, but he respected his choice that the Cancer Saint wasn't interested in men.

DeathMask smiled apologetically. "You know that I'm not able to return your feelings. I'm sorry, Aphrodite."

"Hey, I have gotten over that for quite a while now," the Pisces Saint put on a grin.

"Good." DeathMask was relieved. At the moment it was enough that he had to deal with his feelings for Shaina.

"So, I think I should leave you now. Thanks for the coffee!" The Pisces Saint waved and left the temple.

DeathMask looked after him, then his thoughts returned to the beautiful Ophiuchus Saint.

* * *

Just when he decided to begin with his daily training, DeathMask felt the Leo Saint's Cosmo approaching. He stepped into the hall of his temple and intercepted the lion.

"Hello Aiolia."

"Hello DeathMask." Originally, Aiolia only wanted to pass the 4th temple to get to the training grounds, but when he met the Cancer Saint, he realised he was curious after all. What did Marin tell him - Shaina and the crab were an item now? Aiolia knew the Ophiuchus Saint pretty well and he knew that she had a very soft core hidden behind her tough attitude. He honestly wondered what she might see in the callous crab.

"What are you staring at?" DeathMask wanted to know when he noticed Aiolia's gaze.

"I just wonder what Shaina sees in you."

"Why don't you ask herself?"

"Well, I might do that when I see her again."

"As long as you don't intend to make any move towards her that's fine. But I warn you - she's mine now, and I will not tolerate any untoward approach."

Aiolia looked at him in amazement. "You really seem to be serious about Shaina!"

"And why would you care about that?"

"I care because I respect her greatly and I don't want to see her hurt."

"Neither do I." DeathMask glared at the Leo Saint. Why did he think he had the right to poke his nose in anyone's affairs anyway? "Listen good, kitten. Shaina is very precious to me, and she is definitely no business of yours."

'Kitten'? Aiolia seriously considered hitting DeathMask with a Lightning Bolt in his face. Unfortunately, Athena had expressly forbidden any fights among Saints for such selfish matters. "Very well. But I will watch you and I suggest that you don't hurt Shaina."

"Then you'd better watch Milo as he is much more likely to hurt her. - But don't you have somewhere to go?" DeathMask didn't feel like talking to Aiolia anymore.

The Leo Saint didn't reply anything and simply left. He only hoped that Shaina knew what she was doing.

* * *

DeathMask trained for himself after Aiolia had gone until it was well in the afternoon and he decided to fetch fresh foodstuffs for dinner from Athens. He wanted to surprise Shaina with another tasty menu. Fortunately, it was easy to get the proper ingredients for the Italian cuisine in Greece as practically all Mediterranean recipes used similar things, and so he was soon set for *pesce all'acqua pazza* - white fish with tomato, parsley and lemon - after a mozzarella and tomato salad.

When Shaina showed up and saw DeathMask at the pans again, she smiled. "Angelo, one of those days I want to cook something for you, too." She went to him and kissed him, amazed how familiar it felt to be with him already.

"But for now I want to spoil you," he told her and put the codfish into the pan which gave him a couple of minutes to arrange the salad on the table and pour some wine into two glasses.

"Spoil me?" Shaina gave him another smile. "That you do indeed."

They enjoyed their dinner and this time Shaina insisted on helping him tidy up afterwards.

"I think I could get used to you staying here with me," DeathMask said when the last parts of the dinnerware were stowed away.

"Because I'm useful for cleaning the dishes?" Shaina chuckled.

DeathMask put on an insolent grin and wrapped his arms around her. "Yes. And to warm my bed."

"Do you ask for a Thunder Claw?" Nonetheless she nestled into his arms.

"No. I ask for you to stay with me."

"And what incentive do you offer me?"

"I want to cherish you. And I think... I think I love you after all."

Shaina looked at him in delight. She hadn't expected him to actually say the words to her and she was sure it hadn't come easy to him. As reply she stood on the tips of her toes and kissed him. "Anch'io ti amo, Angelo."