

Aftermath - Path into the Light

DeathMask x Shaina

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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?

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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.