

Chapter 12

Converging Paths

With all the time that has passed, with all the loss, the pain, the sorrow, how can he stand and continue his way down the path toward his destiny? It's a dark path littered with danger, despair, possibly even death—most certainly even death; that is why he must tread softly, carefully planting each step ahead of the other, for one misplaced step could lead to disaster. However, if he chooses to ignore his destiny and let it simply wash over him, thus such a future can also come to be. However, inaction may cause the same level of destruction as though by his own hands.

There is but one choice, one final outcome.

Memories are like thorns ever so gently pressed against the skin. They are only painful when recalled, and when they are, the pain is so sharp, so acute, that everything else fades away into oblivion. Nothing exists but that seemingly endless pain.

But somehow, dazzling stars from heaven began to fall, gently floating in the dusty air until they rest on the ground. Of course, they were not real stars, but rather the fluttering feathers of a god.

Hisoka lie on the floor in a heap of pain, both real and remembered, the scattered feathers from his newly formed wings casting a circle of gold all about him. He was completely unaware of people watching in sheer awe—or maybe disbelief—at him. He was unaware of his outspread wings searching for escape as they thrashed against the binds of the small shack that imprisoned them. He was unaware of the hand on his shoulder that guided him to his feet and somehow lead him outside and into a dismal world illuminated only by the stream of stars and magical lights in the sky and the gods own blazing wings of firelight.

It was Marix that lead him from the tiny house and out into the open. Hopefully the fresh air would help bring him back to his senses, to the reality of what had just happened. It's not every day that a god is reborn to his former glory and power.

Hisoka felt the hand that led him from the house leave his shoulder and the sudden disappearance of its heat made him search for it uneasily. Standing with his angelic golden wings stretched high above his head, Hisoka turned his head toward his

cursed brother stood protectively beside him.

“Welcome back, Aurien,” Marix said simply with a smile, a comment that made Hisoka frown and turn away. How long had it been since he heard that name...?

“That’s not me anymore.”

“Then who are you? Can you tell me?”

Hisoka didn’t answer, he just continued to look out across the black plains of Marix’s in-between world.

“If you can’t tell me, then let me remind you what’s at stake. All of the people in that little house for one,” Marix said, gesturing to the little shack behind them. “And most of all, all of them.” This time Marix raised an arm and pointed to something in the sky straight ahead and slightly to the right of where they stood. He pointed to a bright blue light in the center of a sea of darkness, greatly separated from the other glistening lights of heaven.

Hisoka followed his glance and saw the steady blue light hanging in the black swirl of space. That was his home, where he was born and also where he died. That one single light meant more to him than anything he could ever imagine. And that light was in danger of getting swallowed by demons lingering in the surrounding darkness. Although, even as he fondly caressed the world in his mind, an unknowing tear streaked down his face as a name escaped his lips.

“Sakura.”

Amazed, Marix stood staring in wonder at his brother. After all he has gone through, after losing and finally regaining his former life, he still knows the life of Hisoka the best. Maybe what he said was true. Maybe the life of Aurien has passed rather than that of Hisoka. Simply amazing.

“They are planning something big, Hisoka,” Marix said, reverting back to Aurien’s human name. “I can’t tell for certain what is going on from my vantage point here, but whatever it is, it’s not good.”

Hisoka listened as his locked gaze on the light in the sky fell to the ground in painful thought. “I’m sorry, Marix. You can never go back, can you?”

Marix smiled. “It was my decision.” He clasped a hand on Hisoka’s shoulder. “And it was the right one. Don’t worry about me; I’ll be fine.” Taking a few steps away, Marix faced Hisoka, his face twisting in a dismal frown. “More importantly, we need to figure out what to do about our little brother.”

“Gedeon,” Hisoka said softly, his mind still a jumbled mix of memories. “I think he’s lost it.”

“That was my thought as well. Hisoka, you know he isn’t like the rest of us.”

“I know. He never should have been taken like that...”

The young boy Chryarnth, abused and tortured to death by his own human father, came under the holy goddess’ wing, whisked up from the world between life and death and merged with godly energy to create a new demigod. That was Gedeon; neither human nor god but rather a crude mix of the two.

“It’s unnatural for gods to be born in such a violent manner. But it could explain his erratic behavior...and desire to kill you.”

“His anger is horribly off mark. Why can’t he see that?” Hisoka said, shaking his head in disgust.

Marix could only shrug his shoulders. “Maybe he can’t.”

Hisoka thought for a moment. It was possible. While his own soul was fragmented, each Aura Soul began emitting different personalities, existing solely on its own. Maybe that was the way with Gedeon, too. If his human soul was forcibly mixed with too much mystic energy, his heart soul—his true being—could have drowned in the storm, buried deep beneath layers of memories, hatred and pain. Every new deposit would bury the original soul more and more, leading way to inevitable chaos. “Maybe,” Hisoka agreed, thoughtfully nodding. “Then we’ll have to get to him before he’s completely lost. Maybe he can still remember.” Hisoka looked down at his left arm as he gently touched the ancient scars from the Arena battle with Gedeon.

Nodding, Marix said, “Good, then you know what your next move should be.” Then he sighed deeply, his eyes turning sorrowful. “Look, I know you’ve just come back to us, and you must be feeling so many things right now, but we need you; everyone does. I don’t know what might happen if...”

“It’s okay. You’ve been holding things together from afar for so long. It’s about time I take over, don’t you think?” Hisoka said, smiling. “Besides, I could really use some exercise. It’s been so long since I could do this.” And without as much as a look behind, Hisoka took a slight jump off the ground as his majestic golden wings pounded against the dry air, pushing him higher and higher into the eternal starry sky. It was just like in his dreams as a human, how he could feel the rush of air against his face, how it tossed his hair all about, how his stomach tickled with pleasure as he dove low to the ground only to playfully “walk” across the land while still in midair before dashing off into the sky again.

The joy of being alive is a beautiful thing, Marix thought as he watched Hisoka flutter here and there tirelessly. “If only this moment could never end.”

And it would end all too soon.

“This has gone on far too long. It’s time we stepped in and took control.”

“Only to do what? Make known our role in this play? No, it’s far too soon.”

“And what of him? Do we allow him to work from behind the curtain, then? You know how much of a threat he was from the very beginning.”

“Of course, but threats are easily dealt with, if the Goddess so wishes it.”

“I see. So when all else fails, bring in the Executioner. She will put everything back on course.”

“Was there any doubt? The Guise, on the other hand, ought to be our primary concern. If she cracks, if she caves in, everything else will crumble down upon us.”

“Then we must make sure she plays her part, whether she willing or not.”

“There is no ‘we’ in that act, I’m afraid. She is your sister; you deal with her. I will focus on finding *him*.”

“Very well. Then I expect to see results soon.”

“As do I.”

Floating halfway between the moon and the surface of the planet, the secretive base of some secretive governmental agency loomed across the night sky, its metal hull blended in with the dark backdrop, its twinkling lights became new stars high above. Perhaps no one even bothered to look up to notice. Although, that would be for the better. The base was and needed to remain secret, after all.

Down one of the cold, steel halls through the engineering wing, a small light flickered on. All other lights lining the hallway were extinguished save this one, which came streaming out of the round glass window on the door of a solitary room. The rooms on either side of this hallway were the personal quarters of the engineering and electronics staff. This one room, in particular, was marked by a simple metal tag below the circular window which read “Reine, R.F. #3573”.

The inside of the rooms were basic, much like the quarters on any other seafaring vessel. It offered only the basic necessities a person would need: a simple bed, very hard yet soft enough to accommodate 5 hours of sleep every night, a small washroom with attached shower and sink, and a small desk at which to complete daily paperwork. Anything else that would become necessary to an individual could be

obtained elsewhere within the floating base.

But unlike every other room down this hall, room #3573's light flickered on at 2:16am, its single occupant sat up in bed with cold sweat trickling down the soft side of his face. He raised a similarly soft hand to wipe the sweat and tension away, but found that he couldn't quite see straight. He blinked his eyes tightly shut a few times to clear his vision, but nothing changed. The room about him still looked like an artist scribbled over his surroundings with an agitated stroke of his brush, smearing colors and distorting shapes. The more he tried to clear his vision, the more confused and jumbled his head became. He couldn't recall coming to bed or anything else that transpired the day previous, or week or month, even. As he sat in bed, his mind swimming, one single image peered out of the fuzz, and he imagined that's what caused his heart to race. There was an explosion, fire burst all around him, burning his flesh, huge chunks of falling debris crushed his bones. He saw one flaming piece of the building come falling directly above him before it...

His head ached at the thought but immediately wondered why. If it was just a dream, why did he feel so connected to those feelings, those images, the pain—unless they actually happened. It was a long stretch, he knew, but he never had a nightmare like this before, either. A hand still stroking the side of his face, he moved his hands to rub the exploding images from his eyes when he felt something unnaturally cold and hard on the left side of his face. Spreading out his hand over his face, he could feel no skin beneath his finger tips, only hard, cold steel. His heart stopped. He didn't feel like he was wearing a helmet but that's what his hand and brain were telling him it must be. Ripping the coarse brown blanket from his body, he jumped up and ran into the washroom. He almost didn't recognize the figure staring back at him through the mirror.

Between tufts of green hair peered the shiny surface of metal skin all along the left side of his face. From the very top part of his head down to his chin was completely covered with metal, as though to replace weak flesh. It even covered and surrounded his left eye from which an eerie blue light poked out of the dark, black sclera. Nothing about that eye or his half metal face was natural. As he raised his left hand to touch his face, he noticed that the same metal on his face also covered his entire arm, from the very tips of his fingers all the way up to where his arm came out of his short-sleeved black shirt. Hands shaking, he ripped the shirt off and glanced upon his bare chest. Only the right side of his face and down his neck was lacking the strange metal. Almost every part of his upper body was metallic. And it wasn't just a sort of armor, either, he found out as he rapped a fist on his chest. It wasn't a hallow

sound at all. It was very deep and firm, as though his skin, muscle, and bone was somehow transformed into metal.

How? Why? he wondered. *And when?* The longer he looked himself in the mirror, the more he began to lose sense of his own identity. He merely stood in the washroom, a hand on his metallic chest, wondering just who—or what—in the world he was...

Somewhere deep within the same floating base, Gedeon sat upon a silver throne in a dark, open hall. His flowing robes tickled the purple metallic floor upon which they rested; his long, slender fingers gripped each side of the throne with sharp dragon-like claws. Upon his head rested a thin crown of black steel through which deep blue hair jutted out. Deep blue hair to match his eyes, eyes that seemed as dark as the room around him, as dark as the black metal upon his head, as dark as his thoroughly vacant heart. Impatiently clawing at the throne beneath his fingertips, he glared at the figure hiding in the shadows to his left. Although his eyes could not see, he knew who was standing there.

“Kataki, you know I will call if I need you,” Gedeon said.

Stepping out of the darkness and into the dimly lit, open space of the hall, Kataki nodded casually. “And I felt that time is now.”

Kataki had lost and gained much in the past couple months: the fall at Mt. Sakuba, the death of his sister Sakura, the devastating fight with Hisoka, obtaining a new arm...and power along with it. He also witnessed the death of his most hated enemy only to see him come back to life with renewed strength and power. How any of this was possible, he didn't know, nor did he care. He had thrown away his life and purpose long ago. He was just a hired thug for those who ‘fixed’ him. What else did he have?

“How *kind* of you, although I know you know nothing of the thought. What do you want?”

Kataki shook his head, his long curling hair waving back and forth, “Didn't you feel it? The shaking in the air, almost like it's trembling with fear.”

Gedeon frowned. How very astute this human sacrifice has become, he thought. But still he knows very little of what's really going on around him. “Indeed, I have,” he answered. “The time is coming close. With your help, we can ascend into the stars and claim our rightful place in the realm of the gods.”

“My help,” Kataki said flatly, indifferent. “And why do you think I would

blindly do your bidding?”

“Because you’ve already given yourself to me. You are my toy, you are my tool for which to pierce open the sky. What a great honor it must be for you.”

Kataki only shook his head again. “Honor means nothing to those who have none.”

“And yet you stay. How you amuse me, little boy,” Gedeon said with tongue lashing.

At that moment, Kataki pounced on the demigod, blade in hand. He pierced the magically enhanced dagger Gedeon gave him through the back of the silver throne, just a few centimeters from Gedeon’s head. “I am not your thing to play with. I will stay and go as I please.”

His face so near, Gedeon could feel Kataki’s angered breath on his skin and grinned, unfazed, as he vehemently raised a clawed hand to stroke the side of Kataki’s face. “Ah, but you are.”

Startled by the sudden touch and glare in Gedeon’s eyes, Kataki could not react fast enough as Gedeon pulled the blade free from the throne and held it against Kataki’s neck in a split second.

Gedeon grinned widely and said, “You may go now,” although his eyes said, “You are mine to do as I please.” Quickly flipping the dagger around, Gedeon held it out for Kataki to accept for the second time. As Kataki clenched his hand around the hilt of the blade, he knew it was true.