

Darkness and Light, Heaven and Hell

AC 199

Hilde stood on the boardwalk, the sea breeze whipping her bluish black hair wildly about her heart shaped face. She'd not allowed scissors to it since she left the military and in four years it had grown quite rapidly. When not being tossed by the wind, it would lay in thick waves down to her shoulder blades. To look upon her at nineteen, one would hardly recognize her as the boyish figured girl of just four years ago. It wasn't as if she'd gotten much taller, she hadn't. She was quite delicate in her build. But instead of straight lines defining her outline, they had softened into graceful curves. She was in fact, quite a beautiful young woman. Beautiful and lonely. The fire in her eyes, dampened into near non-existence. All the world saw were ice blue, empty orbs. She had lost her passion when her heart had been broken.

She closed her eyes to the painful memory, but like a demon who takes pleasure from misery, it invaded her thoughts against her will. She remembered the day she had been crushed as if it had been yesterday and not three years gone by. Duo had come home after the ordeal with Mariemaia and Dekim Barton. But he hadn't stayed long. *"I was such a fool to believe he'd stay."* She thought bitterly. *"I was a convenient roof over his head. It was never more than that."* She thought wiping her eyes. She had given her untried heart to the boy with the violet eyes and long chestnut hair, and he had cleaved it in two the day he said good-bye.

Right out of the blue he had come down to breakfast, his few possessions in a small duffel bag. He'd grabbed an apple from the dish on the counter. "Well, it's been real babe. I got a job so I'll be outta your hair. You take care of yourself Tinkerbell. I'll be seein' ya around cutie." He'd said that and All Hilde could do was stare in disbelief. Her voice trapped behind the constriction in her throat. He had shocked her with his abrupt and unexpected early morning announcement. All she could do was stand speechless, her heart crumbling, as he kissed her cheek and walked away. Never looking back. No forwarding address, no phone number, nothing, he just simply vanished without a trace. A cold darkness had settled around her, numbing her completely. Orphaned by the war, and again by the boy she loved. Hilde's inner radiance faded and blinked out.

She looked into the murky depths of the water, still feeling like a victim of a hit and run accident. She'd opened up her very soul to him, nearly gave up her life to help him. And like a greyhound bus he had run her over, dragged her along with him, then when he was through. Discarded her like an old glove. "You really are the God of Death Duo Maxwell. It seems your victims don't have to die to be dead." She said to the darkening sky as she turned around and headed for her tiny apartment. The hole where the little mouse named Hilde hid from the world. It was her fortress of solitude, no one came in and she rarely came out. If she refused contact with anyone, she couldn't be hurt again. She was on the verge of giving up the will to live at all, as it was. She didn't need another Duo pushing her off the cliff she had her fingers dug into, their precarious hold slipping dangerously every day.

Duo flicked a cigarette off the bridge he was standing on, watching the orange coal sizzle and die in the puddle below. He shoved his hands in his pockets and continued his walk home. His apartment was in a very seedy neighborhood, but being the God of Death had it's perks. No one bothered him. Well, one person did. The phone was ringing when he entered his apartment. With a sigh, Duo answered. "What do you want Quatre?" He asked and the other end was silent for a moment before speaking. "Duo, how did you know it was me?" Quatre asked and Duo lit another cigarette before flopping down onto his tattered sofa. "You are the only person other than the landlord who calls. I had a fifty- fifty shot." Duo said, with little of the mirth in his tone that used to be there. He took a deep drag and let out a heavy exhale. "I thought you gave those awful things up Duo." Quatre said and Duo shrugged. "Yeah, and I started again. That's me. I live on the edge." Duo said sarcastically. Quatre frowned. "What's happened to you? This is not the Duo I know." Quatre said worried.

Duo dropped the burning butt of his smoke into a half empty and flat bottle of beer. He watched the glow of the embers illuminate the amber bottle before it's light was destroyed by the malted liquid. "A little older a little wiser I guess." Duo said and Quatre huffed. "A little cynical you mean. There has to be a reason Duo." Quatre said and Duo shut his eyes. "Yeah, Life sucks dick. Unfortunately, not mine." He said and Quatre flinched. "That's awful Duo." He said and Duo rested his elbows on his knees. "Yep, so is my life. What do you want Quatre?" He asked getting up and

stretching his long limbs. Duo's frame no longer that of a boy, but a tall and strapping young man. "I just called to see how you were doing. Not well I see. You need a break Duo." Quatre said, the concern unmasked in his voice. Duo sighed. "What I need Quatre, is for you to quit clucking like a mother hen! What I need, is something I can't have. What I need, I ruined a long time ago. satisfied?" Duo growled and Quatre could feel Duo's anguish penetrate his emphatic heart. "Oh, Duo. I'm sorry." Quatre said and Duo pushed his bangs out of his eyes. "I'm sorry I bit your head off buddy. I'm tired. It's not you I'm pissed at, it's me." Duo said and Quatre nodded. "I understand. I'll call another time. Good-night Duo." Quatre said and Duo sighed. "Good night Quatre." duo said disconnecting the line.

Duo grabbed another beer from the fridge and lit another cigarette as he climbed out onto the fire escape of his apartment to star gaze. "What I need Quatre, I have no idea where to find." Duo said softly to the stars. Closing his eyes, he could picture his need perfectly. Soft blue eyes, a smile that could light up the darkest night, and an exuberant laugh that had always sent a myriad of chills down his spine every time he had heard it echo across a room. He took a long drink of his beer, and sucked more smoke into his lungs. He remembered the devastation in her eyes when he had said good-bye. And like the class act heel he was, had ignored it and left. "You deserve this hell Maxwell. You did it to yourself. Fucking idiot!" Duo hissed in annoyance as he flicked his cigarette into the alley and finished his beer. Wondering where she was, his Hilde, his pixie. Seething in jealousy over the man who probably held that treasure now instead of him.

Hilde sat at her computer, working on a security system for a company based on L2 when her phone rang. She picked it up and continued to type. "Where is that System Schbeicker?" The gravely voice asked over the line. "I'm working on it. You asked for maximum security. That level of encoding takes time. I can't make it over night." Hilde said as her fingers sped rapidly over the keyboard. "I expect it by the deadline. I'm sending someone to pick it up Friday." He said and Hilde sighed. "And you'll have it, if you stop calling and bothering me!" She snapped, hanging up the phone before he could protest and pester her further. The less contact she had with people the better. That was why she worked at home, had an unlisted phone number, and ran a systems analysis company from her small apartment. It was freelance. But it paid the bills, and kept her fed. Even if she hated her work.

She poured herself another cup of coffee and bent back to her monotonous task. She knew of only a two people in the world who'd be able to crack this encryption she encoded into this system. And if those people needed the information, it was only right they be able to obtain it. One was Trowa Barton, and the other was one Heero Yuy. If those two men needed the information, it would be for serious reasons. She sighed, thinking of them only served for her mind to wander over the reason she'd met them in the first place. And the person who had introduced her to them. Her stomach twisted, and she chewed her lip and tried in vain to push his image from her mind. Even after all this time, he had her in a vice like grip. She knew anything short of a physical death was not going to change it either. She finished her task, and dropped the disk into an envelope and sealed it. The courier would arrive tomorrow evening with her money. She'd then give him the disk, and move onto the next job.

Duo grabbed his jacket and his keys and headed out the door. He hated making these trips to Earth. They always seemed to fall on him, with little or no notice. But, Duo was the only Pilot and well, it was part of his job description he guessed. He punched in his coordinates and propped his feet up on the console as he eased the shuttle out of the docking bay. Cigarette hanging out of his mouth, he turned and answered the beeping Vid screen. "Maxwell, For Christ's sake, this is no joy ride. I need that disk back here by Monday morning!" His boss hissed Duo just waved a hand at the screen. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, I know. I'll be on time. Sheesh. Over and out Chief." Duo said flipping the screen off, cutting off his employer before he could say anything else. "Dude, Piloting this hunk a junk is a cake walk compared to the Deathscythe. Now that was a joyride." Duo said boosting the engines of the shuttle and pointing it towards earth.

Duo looked at the address in his hand. "Man oh man. This dump is almost worse than mine." he said as he climbed the stairs and pushed the button on the doorway. A woman's voice came over the distorted, and gunshot riddled speaker-system. "Yes?" the voice said. "I'm from Nav-Com systems. You gotta disk for me." Duo said and he heard the door buzzer sound, no response from the woman. He rolled his eyes and opened the door. Climbing the stairs and knocking on the door, he froze, when SHE answered. "Hilde?"

Hilde stood there, her heart painfully constricted in her chest. She dropped the package when she opened her door and found the last person she ever expected to see standing there on her doorstep. She hardly recognized him, but in the same breath, would have known him anywhere. The same obscenely long braid of chestnut silk fibers, the

same violet eyes. A lot taller, than she remembered, and the boyishness had melted away from his features, leaving a sinfully handsome man in place of the young boy she remembered. But somehow, unmistakably Duo. He stood there, staring at her, a cigarette behind his ear. That caught her off guard. His eyes, they no longer sparkled with mischief. He looked hardened, gritty, almost mean.

She was gorgeous, his knees fairly gave out when she answered the door. He'd have known her face anywhere, it was etched in his mind for all eternity. She had changed, but for the better. Her hair was thick and fell in great waves over her shoulders, framing that heart shaped face. Those cornflower blue eyes, still big, still able to bore right through him. But, empty, the joy he'd seen in them before was gone. They held no soul. That terrified him. Who had robbed his Pixie of her joy? His eyes wandered down her tiny frame, her tiny, breathtaking, no longer flat, frame. She snapped her fingers at him. "My eyes are up here." She said, her voice cold, controlled, angry. He looked up sheepishly. "You look beautiful Hilde." He said smiling at her. She didn't smile back. "I don't know any Hilde. You're mistaken. Here's your disk." She said shoving the envelope at him. Where her eyes watering? Before he could say anything further, the door slammed shut in his face.

He stood there dumbfounded. He knew it was her, why had she lied like that? He just stared at the oak slab before him, unable to move. Her payment and his disk still in his hand. He smirked, it was Hilde, he knew it. He knocked again. "Oi, Hilde. Hey Hilde open up. You forgot your money Tinkerbell." He said and the Door flew open, she snatched the money from his hand, her face red with tears and slammed the door in his face once more.

Now he knew it was Hilde for sure, and she was mightily pissed off at him. "What's wrong Hilde?" He called through the door. He received no reply. His heart sank in his chest, he had so longed to see her, and he had always thought she'd have been pleased to see him. Obviously, she was not pleased in the slightest. "Hilde please, talk to me." He said again through the door. Silence, save for the faint sound of Hilde weeping within.

Hilde sat listening to him pound on the door. The shock of seeing him, mixing with the multitude of emotions raging and warring within her. Again, as had happened the first time she'd laid eyes on him, her whole being quivered. The raw effect he had on her had only increased in potency. She hated the control he had over her, she was furious at her own weakness towards him. She hated him, for the way he had walked out on her. She hated herself for never letting him go. She hated whatever sadistic deity was toying with her life. "Hilde! Hilde, open the door please. Talk to me." He pleaded. She sobbed deeper. She would not let him in, not again. She was barely alive as it was, if he left her again, she really would cease to be. She could not endure the plague the God of Death brought with him, not again. She fled to the window and out onto the fire escape.

Duo heard her within, he heard the tell tale creak of rusty metal. He raced back downstairs and into the alley. Where he saw her scrambling down the rickety ladders. Then his heart stopped as he saw the platform begin to separate from the building. "Hilde! Hilde Look out!" He cried racing to her side. Her scream cut through him like a rapier. Her crumpled form on the pavement robbed him of his breath. reminding him painfully of the last time he had thought death had claimed her. He cradled her in his arms, her motionless form looking as if she were a sleeping princess from an ancient fairy tale. His eyes blurred with tears. "Hilde, please. Give me another chance. Don't run from me please." He whispered into her hair as he held her close. Rocking her still body in his arms as he heard the sirens approaching.

Duo paced the halls of the hospital, waiting for news. "You are the man who was with her when she fell correct?" The doctor asked as he came out. Duo nodded. "How is she?" Duo asked and did not like the look on the Doctor's face. "She's suffered a bad blow to the head. It's unsure if there will be any permanent damage. She's in a near coma and she is muttering the word "Shinigami" repeatedly. Does that mean anything to you?" The Doctor asked and Duo winced. "I'm Shinigami. One God of Death at your service Doc." Duo said bitterly, kicking a nearby chair. The Doctor looked confused. "I take it, there is a long story involved here." the Doctor said and Duo nodded. "Too long. Too many mistakes and broken promises to even know where to start. Just call me one major fuck up in the life department." Duo said flopping down into the chair he'd recently kicked. The Doctor sighed. "An all too common tale I see. Even when Peace is obtained, the soldiers have to learn to fight a new battle. The toughest battle is life. Death is the easy part." The Doctor said patting Duo's shoulder. "Don't think I don't recognize you Son. It's hard not too. A little older, perhaps, but still that same youth that blew up my hospital. Gundam Pilot Duo Maxwell." The doctor said and Duo smirked. "Hey, whatdya know. I'm famous." He said sarcastically.

The doctor sat down next to Duo. "Sorry about blowing up the place. I blew up a lot of things that got in my way." Duo added and the doctor sighed. "You did what War demanded you to do. So, tell me about the girl in there. How can I help her? I have a feeling only you hold that answer Mr. Maxwell." the doctor said and Duo sighed. "It's just Duo." Duo said stretching out his long legs as he leaned back into his chair. "I have a list of Fuck ups a mile long where she is concerned. Let me spare you the long version and condense it for ya. We lived together about a year, I left three

years ago, and basically never had the guts to pick up a phone. I met her again tonight by accident. She slammed the door in my face then ran from me. Then she fell. Story in a nutshell, and as usual all my fault.” Duo said standing up and popping a credit into the coffee machine, obtaining a black cup of sludge that resembled the beverage known as coffee. But tasted more like refined excrement.

The doctor nodded. “I see. Do you love her?” the doctor asked and Duo downed his coffee in one gulp, grimacing. “Doc, I have loved her from the moment I met her, only I was too scared to admit then. A lot of good it does me now. She can’t stand the sight of me.” Duo said crumpling the paper cup and tossing it into the trash. “She’s angry at you that’s obvious, but is it beyond her to forgive?” the doctor asked and Duo shrugged. “Three years ago I would have said no. Honestly, I don’t know now.” Duo said his violet eyes dark and searching for hope. The doctor stood. “Well, I suggest to choose your words wisely then. Talk to her, whether she hears or not, I cannot say. But it might help, if you told her what you just told me.” The doctor said, leading the way into the intensive care unit. Where a vision akin to Snow White, who had eaten the poison apple lay sleeping. Duo pulled up a stool beside her and took her hand. He brushed a raven lock from her cheek and placed a kiss to her palm. “Hilde, I’m such a fool.” He began as he held her hand and poured out a litany of all his regrets and apologies to her silent form.

Duo closed his eyes, and thought of all the time he’d wasted. He’d thrown away the only thing he’d ever given a damn about for nothing. He remember the morning he’d left her, and fought the urge to punch the wall. “Hilde, I left you because I was a coward. The only excuse I can give, is hollow and empty at best.” He said running his finger’s through her hair. It was sinfully soft and smelled exactly as he remembered. Peaches and Cream, and honey, her unique shampoo assaulted his senses, and stirred his memories. “I woke up one morning and I was looking at you in the kitchen. A towel wrapped around your head, in your bathrobe. And I wanted you. I wanted you so bad it hurt. It scared the living hell outta me Hilde. I was afraid to get any closer. And I was confused. I can’t tell you how much I regret walking out of that door.” He said, his lips against her forehead. “You’ll be pleased to know I’ve felt like shit ever since. I can’t get a date, cause I compare every single female in the known universe to you. They all fail miserably.” He said kissing her cheek softly. “I’ve missed you so much, I tried to call, but you’d gone, and I had no idea where you were.” He added tracing her features with his finger. Her cheekbones, her jaw line, the delicate curve of her eyebrows, the soft roundness of her lips. “Then I stayed away, because I thought some lucky bastard had you. And I was so angry I just kind of fell into a fog. My world without you is Hell. What I deserve I guess for hurting you. I’m sorry Hilde.” He said brushing her lips in a kiss, before he broke down and sobbed into her chest. Still, she never stirred.

Hilde wandered the darkness, terror held her in it’s grip. She had this horrible sensation of falling, and then this oblivion had surrounded her. Now she wandered the endless labyrinth of midnight, not knowing where to turn to find the light. Then after a time that seemed a maddening eternity, a voice began to call to her from the endless void of night. “Hilde, come back to me.” the familiar voice echoed into the chasm she was lost within. She turned reaching for the elusive sound.

In the distance a gray, whirling mist formed and she ran to it’s beckoning apparition. It’s wispy tendrils wrapped around her, tightly, they began to suffocate her. She clawed to be free. “He asks you to return, and you run to me.” A different Voice taunted her. “No! I thought! Help me!” Hilde cried and the voice in the mists laughed at her. A form took shape a dark Angel with black eyes smiled at her. “This is the image you paint of the voice is it not? I am your Shinigami.” The apparition demon asked smirking at her, his long black braid blowing in an invisible wind. “No! No!” Hilde cried trying to flee from the demon in the smoky haze. “Hilde Come back to me!” The Voice echoed once more. His voice, then his form. He stood there, bathed in the glow of sunlight. He was almost blindingly bright to look upon. His violet eyes filled with concern, with Love. His unbound hair dancing in the wind about him. His arms outstretched, beckoning her to run into their warmth. “Forgive me. Come home to me. Please Hilde.” He said and she felt the mists clutching her give way, she broke free and ran into his embrace. His warm arms wrapping around her in light and love. Infusing her soul with peace. “I love you Duo.” She sighed as the light enveloped them both.

Duo’s muscles were cramped and asleep as he kept vigil over his sleeping princess. Afraid to get up or move lest she awaken. His heart souring as he heard her gentle whisper in her slumber. “I love you Duo.” She’d said those four little words and his heart pounded in renewed vigor. He prayed she’d meant them. To whatever dream deity she’d said them too, the name was his. He grasped that straw with both hands and held on tight. “Mr. Maxwell sir, I need to check her statistics, if you’d wait outside please sir.” The Nurse said and Duo stood and stretched, leaning over to

place a tender kiss on Hilde's brow. "They're kickin' me out Babe. But, I'll be back." He said, sounding more like his old self before taking this opportunity to stretch his legs and grab a breath of fresh air.

Once outside, Duo went to his cigarettes, then opted instead to toss them into the nearest trash can. He then went to the pay phone and dialed the office. The secretary answered. "Hey Perkins. Listen, tell Mr. Head up his Ass, I quit. I'll mail him his disk." Duo said and Miss Emma Perkins laughed. "Wow, Why Duo?" She asked at his sudden levity. "Let's just say I've got a new outlook on life. And I need to be here." He said his, old grin coming more readily to his lips. He hung up the phone, walked across the street to the Post office and Mailed the disk, then returned to Hospital.

He did not expect what he found when he walked back into intensive care. A pair of brilliant sky blue eyes met his, and they narrowed at him angrily. Duo didn't care he just fell to his knees beside her bed. "Forgive me?" He asked and Hilde crossed her arms over her chest. "It's not your fault I fell. I knew that rickety old thing was dangerous." She said and Duo grasped her hands. "That's not what I meant. I meant for all the other asinine things I've done." He said and Hilde frowned. "I don't know Duo. I'll have you know you broke my heart." She said and Duo lowered his gaze. "Not just yours Hilde. Mine too." He said and looked up at her, his eyes streaming with tears. "Please give me one more chance." He asked and Hilde's eyes filled with tears, the emptiness not quite so daunting. "Don't play games with me Duo. I can't take rejection again. I won't." She said and Duo pulled her tightly into his arms. "It wasn't rejection Hilde. Oh God, is that what you thought?" He asked and she nodded. "I'm so sorry. It was all me Hilde. I was scared of all the feelings I had over you. I didn't want to hurt you, I wanted you so bad. I was afraid I was going to do something rash if I lived that close to you. It was all me Hilde. I was a fool." He said and Hilde sobbed into his chest.

He rocked her gently, stroking her soft hair. "I love you Hilde. I always have and I always will." He said softly, inhaling her sweet fragrance deeply. "I love you too Duo. God Help me I do. My life has been darkness without you." She said and Duo lifted her chin to gaze into her eyes. "Mine's been Hell without you." He said bringing his lips down to meet hers. His kiss bringing the light she had craved back into her life. Her acceptance of his kiss sending him to the heights of heaven. Their souls crying for joy having been reunited once more.

Sadly, not every story can have a happy ending. Fate can be kind in one breath and in the next, deal a cruel and crushing reality. He felt her arms slacken and go limp, and her lips curve into a sweet smile. "I love you Duo" She said as she closed her eyes, and fell asleep in his arms. A sleep from which this time, she would not awaken. The Doctors had said an aneurysm was the cause, and how she had even awoken the first time was a mystery. Duo new the answer, it had been gift from God. He had brought them together, so they could part in peace. He had given them a change to mend the discord in their lives so they could close that chapter and move onto the next. He knew she'd always be there in his heart, and he know knew, she had loved him as he had loved her. It made letting her go, somehow easier this time. He knew she was happy now, and he could look to his own future. A future that he could now face. He had a clean slate, an open book, into which he could write a life free of doubt and regret. Sometimes it takes letting go of the past, to live in the future. Darkness and Light, Heaven and Hell, one cannot exist without the other.

Author's Note: It bloody killed me to write this! I am weeping my head off! I know this is a departure from my normal fluff and sap. Now I know why I write it so often. I hate to cry! ** Passes out tissues ** Please don't kill me, let's have a good cry together shall we?

I will put the Angst demon back in the closet where I found it.
