

CORRUPTED BLOOD LORD

Chapter 4 - 3 – Budding Tree

Teclos was training by the tree behind their house again, cross-legged, eyes closed, and focused. A quiet breeze tugged at his loose shirt.

He was nine now – more aware of his surroundings than he'd ever been in his past life – yet he still struggled to keep his emotions in check from time to time.

The orchard around him rustled with birdsong and the distant rhythm of the forge hammering—ringing across Kolma. The sun hung high, casting dappled light through the leaves overhead.

He was close to forming a second mana circle – a turning point. With one circle already in his core, he was stronger and healthier than most children on Earth.

This time, he aimed to form the second one in his heart. It would grant him not only greater strength, but also resistance to poisons—a practical choice, considering he worked with herbs every day. Teclos preferred an immediate edge, something he could rely on before intellect and willpower came into play.

For now, his shadow projection was weak, barely below what would be considered tier-one spells. The best he could manage was nudging a cup of tea toward himself – but it was progress nonetheless.

Talmir had even praised him for it, offering a few pointers—with a second circle in the heart, his control and range would grow drastically.

Just as he was settling back into his breathing, a shout broke his focus.

"Oi!" came a familiar voice.

Teclos opened one eye and turned to see Ralph jogging up the hill, his dark-green tunic splattered with what looked like a mix of dirt and a grin that promises mischief.

"You spacing out again?" Ralph asked, stopping to catch his breath. "C'mon! You'll miss the good fights again."

Teclos raised an eyebrow. "More 'honorable combat'? Also, I'm in the middle of my training."

"Absolutely — and forget your training for now, come on." Ralph was already halfway down the path again. "It's going to be fun this time, trust me. Everyone's there!"

Rolling his eyes, Teclos stood up and followed.

They passed through the heart of Kolma — a rustic village of thatched roofs and dirt paths. Around one hundred and eighty people called it home: hunters, farmers, gatherers, and craftsmen. The village was surrounded by a sturdy wooden palisade nearly three and a half meters tall — not grand, but solid, built from thick logs reinforced with clay and old enchantments.

Its layout was simple. The central square held the well, the forge, and a few communal buildings. The outer ring was lined with homes and workshops. Beyond the gates lay the forest — wild, untamed, and full of adventures.

Teclos glanced at the palisade as they walked. Once, it had felt imposing, a wall keeping him in.

Now, it seemed fragile. Thin. Especially after hearing Talmir's tales of mana-empowered beasts and mutated creatures larger than carts. He used to laugh at such stories, made up jokes to scare him— but the deep scratches on Talmir's armor weren't jokes.

The village's training ring lay just past the fields: an open circle of packed dirt surrounded by wooden posts, the same ones used to hang lanterns during festivals. Today, it was packed with children, ages eight to fourteen again. Some gossiped, others cheered and shoved to get a better view.

Teclos tilted his head. "Who's fighting this time? There seem to be more older kids than usual."

Ralph grinned. "Well, it's the two lovebirds again — Gillard and Loric! Tadaa! Isn't this a nice surprise? Haha, you'd never see anything if you didn't have a friend like me."

Teclos blinked. "Loric accepted another fight? After last time?"

He chuckled. "Ah, that explains the crowd."

Smirking, he added, "So? What's your prediction? How's Gillard going to stomp him this time?"

Ralph snorted. "Easy. Knockout by kick to the face! Haha this is going to be fun!"

Inside the ring, Gillard and Loric were already squaring up — two of the strongest kids in their age group. Between them, an older boy raised a hand and called for

silence. The crowd hushed. Everyone knew about their rivalry — it had been going for nearly a year now.

Gillard was the stronger of the two, broad-shouldered and calm, the blacksmith's son with arms like stone for his age. He stood steady, gaze fixed on Loric.

Loric, on the other hand, was pure fire — impulsive, intense, and desperate to prove himself. He scowled, eyes sharp, muscles coiled for a quick dash, which only seemed to amuse Gillard further.

They raised their hands.

Gillard settled into a defensive stance. Loric crouched, ready to dash.

As always, Loric moved first.

He burst forward, wind magic swirling faintly around his legs to push him faster, and unleashed a flurry of sharp jabs aimed at Gillard's jaw and ribs.

Gillard blocked most with practiced ease, shifting his weight and driving a heavy knee toward Loric's thigh.

But Loric rolled backward in a somersault, landing lightly on his feet. His speed had improved, Teclos noted.

After a heartbeat's pause, Loric lunged again — spinning twice in midair for a double heel kick aimed straight at Gillard's chest.

Gillard dug his heels into the dirt, anchoring himself so he wouldn't be pushed back. He raised his arm to block — but Loric's kick feinted mid-swing, changing direction toward Gillard's head.

Bold and Risky.

Gillard was ready for it.

He suddenly leaned back, planting his hands on the ground and kicking himself back up to his feet. The strike sliced harmlessly through the air above him. Loric's balance broke, his momentum carrying him too far forward—leaving his guard wide open.

Gillard's counter came instantly. He stepped in and swung a brutal hook across Loric's abdomen, putting all his strength behind it.

The crack echoed through the ring.

Loric flew backward, hit the ground hard, and didn't move for a few seconds.

Silence fell.

Then the crowd erupted into cheers.

Short-lived, but loud — everyone agreed it had been one of their best fights yet.

"I guess he wasn't kicked in the head in the end," Teclos snickered. "Bet Loric regrets showing up today."

Loric heard him but could only gasp for air in reply.

As the match ended, Loric's glare shot toward Teclos, just for a moment. That was enough for him to know that he was probably on Loric's hit list as well—not that he cared.

Two of Loric's friends helped him walk off the sparring ground, while Teclos and Ralph came up to Gillard laughing. Ralph patted Gillard on the shoulder, congratulating him. Teclos also raised his hand for a high five but only got a confused look from both of them.

Remembering that this was a thing of the past, he tried to cover it up.

"I invented a new greeting we should use among us. I'll call it a high five... basically, you both raise your hands and slap them together as if to say 'good job.'"

"Bahahah, what the hell kind of greeting is that? Hi friend—gets slapped—you have the weirdest ideas sometimes," said Ralph mockingly.

Gillard was laughing as well for a change. "It seems you're an inventor of greetings... maybe you should present it to the king."

But the fun ended when Loric came to his senses.

"Having fun, are we?"

He turned to Teclos, still breathing hard. "You think you could've done better, oh mighty darkness freak? Yes, I regret I couldn't rip Gillard's head off... but you, a loner nobody, should stay out of this and go back to your witch of a mom, you demon spawn!"

The words hung in the air.

Normally he would have ignored such provocations, but he still had trouble controlling his emotions, and this time anger boiled up.

Teclos stepped forward, brows low, fists clenched. "Say that again!"

"What? That you think you're better than us? We all know what you are."

That was enough.

A flicker of mana surged inside Teclos—cold and familiar. The shadows around his feet twitched, all around him the light dimmed, and mana gathered around his fist. It was shocking to everyone since this was the first time he had shown his power to anyone but his parents.

Two of the older kids rushed toward Teclos and Loric, positioning themselves between them.

The two older boys — one a fourteen-year-old who'd already started weapon sparring and the other twelve — moved in sync like the wind. They were among the most promising young hunters, and they were brothers.

"Enough," the older one said. "Calm your mana now, Teclos, and step away."

Of course, Teclos wasn't budging even a little until Gillard shoved him and barked, "Teclos! Calm down, man!"

With that, he came to his senses and noticed the light around him was dimmer. He proceeded to release the mana and stepped back.

Loric was dragged away. Teclos stood frozen, breathing hard. He hadn't attacked— but he could have. The darkness had responded to his anger like a dog to a whistle.

A moment later, the crowd began to disperse with murmurs about what had just happened.

"The hell, man, you were really scary just now," said Ralph, concerned.

"Leave it, Ralph. And Teclos, don't worry about it. Everyone gets angry sometimes... just try to calm down next time buddy, we aren't allowed to use mana yet."

"Yeah, I don't know what came over me."

No adults had seen it — or so he thought.

But when he got home, news seemed to travel fast. Talmir and Saldia were already waiting at the table.

He sat in silence as they looked at him.

Saldia was the first to speak — her tone soft. "What happened?"

Teclos hesitated. "He provoked me."

"But you almost used your mana to harm that boy," she said gently.

Talmir leaned forward, voice firmer. "With killing intent at that... You think that's strength? Letting a few words unchain power you barely understand—and have no control over?"

"I didn't do anything."

"But you wanted to," Talmir said. "And next time, you might. Listen, son — it's bad enough that everyone knows your attribute, but to use it so aggressively?"

Teclos looked down. He didn't respond.

"You're still a child, and mistakes can happen. We just want you to be aware that this was a mistake," Saldia added quietly. "What Kolma needs isn't just strong hands. We need people who can live beside each other. Fight together. Laugh together."

"Everyone contributes out here," Talmir said. "Or we all suffer. Don't forget that."

After a long silence, Teclos nodded.

He ate quietly that night, the stew warm in his bowl. The candlelight danced across the walls as his thoughts drifted.

He was reminded once again that this wasn't Earth.

There were no neon lights. No steel towers. No static hum of screens.

Only wood and stone...and the distant echoes of beasts and monsters.

And here, everyone mattered.

On Earth, he had been replaceable — a cog in a system too big to notice his absence.

Well, besides his previous family and friends.

But here?

If he vanished, people would actually notice a missing cog.

And his new family – they'd care as well.

He looked toward the window, where dusk painted the sky purple and gold.

His father had fought the beasts and monsters every day. Killed them. Protected his family...he was needed here – to protect and bring food to the table.

And someday, Teclos would do that too.

By mental age, Teclos was actually older than Talmir– and here he was...losing control over an insult by a brat.

He needed to be better.

To think before acting. To restrain the impulses that wanted to punch a little kid's teeth out.

Talmir had said it again and again, be mindful of your actions. Be kind to those who deserve it. And use your strength to help, not the other way around.

Now the only thing left, was for him to reel those emotions in.

The next morning, Teclos woke up early – before the sun, before the birds to do just that.

Meditate.

To maybe get better control over his emotions. He didn't have a better idea and it supposedly helped the monks in his previous life.

With quiet steps, he slipped outside.

The dirt beneath him was cold and comforting.

The village around him, still and lightless.

Within that silence... he tried to think of good things, happy things.

He felt how peaceful the village was, how safe it was.

He had roots here now—a sense of belonging he would have to protect, not waste on petty squabbles.

Although that could sometimes prove difficult, he was willing to try.

And like all roots, they would deepen — slowly, but surely — into unshakable bonds someday...well at least he hoped so.