

Cursed Blood - o.Prologue.o[405 words]

Mythira had always been the kingdom in the center of the Blood War. A war between humans cursed by demonic blood, Darkbloods, and humans with divine gifts, Lightbloods. It was black and white for the world of Terrafell. Lightbloods would rule, and Darkbloods would fight to take that away from them.

After decades of war, it became apparent that maybe the people of Terrafell had gotten too comfortable. More and more Lightbloods became those born with powers meant to help others and not to fight back, meaning that Darkbloods, who almost always had destructive powers, had gained the advantage. Queen Amara of Mythira, an elderly Queen with a singular son, had grown tired of the constant news telling her of the loss her kingdom was suffering.

Amara was certain that this was the end; that Mythira should surrender and pray for the Darkbloods to convert them instead of killing them all outright.

This was until her young son, Prince Elijah of Mythira, was attacked by a Darkblood. Guards swiftly rescued the Queen's son, and brought the body to her while she healed her son with her Lightblood gift. Once he was safe, back at full health, the furious woman glared down at the sunken body of the vampire Darkblood. She spat on it, fury building in her body.

That was, until a baby began to cry.

Being a mother, Queen Amara recognized the sound of a wailing child. One taken from its mother, stolen at the first opportunity. Rumours had circled before, rumours of Darkbloods stealing Lightblood children to convert them into their own. The baby and her son would've become monsters had the guards failed their job.

Elijah himself was the first to react. He stumbled over to the body, rolling it over. Crushed underneath the lifeless bag of bones was a crying baby girl, her skin a perfect golden colour. The Queen knelt beside her son, allowing him to watch as she let her warm magic heal the crying child, whose bones had been damaged by being crushed. Watching the child cry in her arms, Queen Amara felt her will strengthen. She was determined to save her people and destroy the Darkbloods.

With a glint in her eye, the Queen handed a nanny the wailing child. The baby's parents would search for her, and the child would return home. But in that moment, Queen Amara of Mythira had another thought on her mind.

It was time for her to declare war.

Cursed Blood - 1.Cloud Rose.1[1,274 words]

I wonder how wrong this can go, I thought, watching my brother, Terrance, glare at my other brother, Warren. Along with those two, I had a third brother, Charles. Us four were the rowdy children of Alice and Jeremy Rose, two farmers in the Valley of Mythira. The Valley surrounded the castle, built on the peak of Mythic Mountain, and was considered a part of the capital of our kingdom. The Rose family was known for healthy, well-grown crops and therefore popular in sales for anyone living in the Valley or elsewhere nearby. Even with a good reputation and promised comfy life being a farmer, my brothers had decided that my parents' paths were not for them, and were enrolled to go to knights' school in the fall. It was currently spring, meaning I still had months to go with my three brothers. Terrance and Warren were twins, each with their own pale freckled faces, chocolate hair and honey eyes. Charles and I looked alike as well, but not like the other two. We both had tanned skin, hazel eyes and leaner bodies. The thing that tied us all together was the thick chocolate hair that our parents had as well. Our mother looked like the twins, but with vibrant blue eyes. Our father shared their pale skin, but had hazel eyes identical to Charles' and similar to mine.

We were a cheery, strong-willed bunch. Which led to my current thoughts. *Are Terrance and Warren really going to fight right now?*

It had started with me teasing Terrance about liking a girl he saw in the market, and soon Warren realized that they were fond over the same girl. The twins were always fiery with each other, so I wouldn't have been surprised if they fought.

They continued bickering about who liked her first, causing Charles and I to laugh while our parents shook their heads. It was after dinner, and my parents looked exhausted as my brothers bickered under the light of a dangling lantern.

"Katlyn," my mother called, using my middle name. She disapproved of my name, Storm-Cloud (I go by Cloud alone), but refused to explain why they named me Cloud.

I rose from my spot on the floor, leaving Charles to keep tabs on the fight. "Yeah, mom?"

"Are you busy tomorrow?" She asked. It wasn't the first time. Whenever she asked this, it meant that she and my father were caught up on -- or even ahead of -- work and that she was free for a day.

I grinned. "Of course. Girls' day?"

My mother mirrored my grin, blue eyes sparkling. Our girls' days were tradition, since the testosterone overload in our home was influencing us to be more macho, or at least that's what our joke was. Since us Lightbloods were constantly fighting an unforgiving war, our family was hell bent on focusing on the good in Mythira.

The Rose family was a surprising bunch of Lightbloods. My father had power over the air, but wasn't that powerful. His control was limited to a certain radius, and the bigger the effect his power would have, the less he could do it. My mother, on the other hand, was able to talk to plants. Not aloud in the literal sense, but if she came in contact with a plant, she could communicate with it and find out all about it. Their combined abilities aided them with farming.

Terrance and Warren had linked powers. The two were almost fully telepathic; Terrance could read people's emotions, and sometimes thoughts, while Warren could speak in other people's heads, but never receive a response. Charles was gifted with the power of giving or sucking energy from people, making them dance for hours or drop down in a deep sleep. Helpful for partying.

Myself, on the other hand, showed no power. I, Storm-Cloud Katlyn Rose, had nothing to use to my advantage. It was uncommon but not unheard of -- after all, I'd been kidnapped by a Darkblood as a child, only to be rescued by royal forces. People figured that the contact with a Darkblood as a baby had made my magic hide from me, or that it left my blood entirely.

So, this led to me being the next in line to run the Rose family farm while my brothers went off to be soldiers. I didn't mind my fate, not one bit. I'd be happy as a simple citizen of the beautiful Mythira, living with a family of my own.

I'd be able to survive that.

This was the way I lived; simply, happily. I flashed my mother one last grin before glancing at my brothers. Terrance and Warren sat on separate chairs, leaving the sofa empty as Charles watched them on the floor by the fireplace. My parents stood in the doorway to our living room, dry smiles on their faces. Charles was holding back a giggle, and I shook my head at them with a smile.

Terrance glared at me, sensing my amusement. He could feel the amusement of all of us.

Getting the message that I wasn't helping, I walked to our front door and pulled on my shoes and light jacket. My leather clothing, traveler's clothes, was comfortable and worn in, keeping me warm in the spring breeze as I left the stuffy house. I'd always only ever worn leather, specifically traveling clothes. It was tough, but grew to be comfortable once I wore it for a while. As I strolled away from our plain, mostly wooden house and large farm, the breeze blew my hair into my face, sticking to it. Many vendors' shops were closed up tight, their owners nowhere to be seen, while the nightly crowd began to appear and take to the taverns of the Valley. Guards patrolled, though the threat of Darkbloods was unlikely in the capital.

And that thought was the one that jinxed me, and my entire family.

I was the first to react as I heard a scream. My blood ran cold as I recognized the voice as my mother's, and I began sprinting back toward the house. Guards saw my urgency and followed, trying to get me to stop to speak to them, but I pushed myself harder and continued to sprint ahead of them.

When I reached my home, I could see that all the lights were out inside, but my family was very much awake. From outside, I could hear my brothers and father as well as my mother, who continued screaming. The guards continued to yell for me to stop as I threw open the door, only for the noise to cut off abruptly.

Panting, I realized that the darkness seemed darker than dark, and that I couldn't even hear my own breathing. By the time I realized that something was hiding in the shadows, manipulating my senses, it was too late. The Darkblood creature flew at me, sharp nails digging into my shoulders as we both went out the front door. My back slammed into the pavement of the road, but I managed to keep my head from hitting as I struggled, screaming as well. As the creature snapped at me, I began to hear once again, and the sound of crying rose to my ears.

Then, there was a war cry, and the Darkblood landed one bite on my arm before jumping off and running down the road, heading for the outskirts of the Valley.

My arms and shoulders were bloody, continuing to bleed as the guards ran into my house, completely forgetting about me as they heard crying from inside.

And, to be honest, I would've focused more on them than me too. I didn't seem to be seriously hurt.

Key word being *seem*.

Cursed Blood - 2.Infected.2[1,179 words]

An hour later, the guards left our house with a promise of an investigation and assurance that it was safe. The five of us gathered in the living room, faces stained with tears and grief-stricken.

Why?

Because there were five of us. My parents, Warren, Charles, and myself.

The Darkbloods had taken Terrance like they'd taken me as a baby. Charles' back was missing a chunk, and his arm was broken. Warren's nose was broken, and his calf had a bite mark in it. My parents were worse, with identical cuts down their arms that had been

bleeding like crazy and slashes across their toned stomachs. I was the best off, physically, but the most out of it.

I should've been here, I cried to myself, picturing Terrance's face as he got dragged away. The last interaction between us had been me laughing at him for fighting with his twin about liking a girl. It had been me mocking him and Warren.

I glanced at the twin in the room. He looked horrified with himself, and I figured he was reliving the fight they had. I wondered if they'd made up before Darkbloods attacked.

At the thought of the beasts, my wounds began to throb. My shoulders were bleeding, but the bite on my arm was bruising, looking purple and green. Despite not hitting my head, it was pounding as if my skull had been cracked open. What was worse was the silence. All we could do was wait for the guards to bring Terrance home, or deliver us the news of his death.

My stomach churned, and I rose from my spot on the sofa and ran toward the bathroom. Silence followed as I collapsed, holding onto the sink as I stared at myself in the mirror. Blood soaked through my leather and cloth tunic, my hair fell in tangles, and dirt was smudged across my cheek.

Then, my night got worse. As I stared at myself in the mirror, I watched as a spot of black flashed through the exposed skin under my tunic. It caught my attention, I continued to watch as two more appeared. Despite the loss of my brother, I was disturbed by whatever was travelling below my skin, and peeled off my tunic.

This time, I saw it happen. The bite mark on my arm, bruised and scabbing over, had turned black around the edges. The black substance had oozed in my veins, and bits of it were being carried along with blood throughout them. Those drops of strange fluid were the black, dark flashed under my skin.

And they terrified me.

A Darkblood bite mixing with my blood.

I could be killed for this if anyone finds out.

This time, I threw up, my fear controlling my body. The second the burning sensation in my mouth was gone, I pulled my tunic back on and left the bathroom, beelining for my room. My family, still in shock in the living room, didn't voice their questions as I holed up in my bedroom, staring out the window.

My brother was gone, and I was infected.

Perhaps this wouldn't be up for the guards to deal with alone. If I was infected by a Darkblood, I didn't know what would happen to me. It would be safer for my family if I

was out searching for my brother when the Darkblood's influence either killed me, or worse.

I sighed, exhausted. I didn't have it in me to run away tonight, not now after losing Terrance. The eldest of the Rose children, since he'd been born minutes before Warren. My big, reckless brother who's freckles could form an elephant if you pinched the skin just right. The cheery boy who was going to protect people, and help them.

Damn Darkbloods, I thought, rolling onto my stomach. Shutting my eyes, I felt my breath even out until it came to a steady, slow rhythm.

I'll wake up and realize this was all a dream, I thought, drifting off.

~o•o~

Sunlight warmed my cheek, while drool cooled the other. Waking up was a slow process for me, and I gradually came to as the sunlight warmed my face and bed. Pushing myself up, I noticed that I was sore in my shoulders and along my arm, and that my clothes from the day before were ripped, and still on my body. Chastising myself for being lazy, I stumbled to my closet and pulled out fresh clothes before stumbling to the bathroom and washing up. Glancing at my body, I noticed that there were dark circles on my shoulders and one forearm, but otherwise nothing. Even the pain was fading. I finished up and pulled on my clothes, tugging a brush through my hair. The house was quiet, and I figured that I had woken up earlier than normal since everyone else seemed to still be snoring.

That was until I walked into the kitchen and saw my family sitting around the table in grieving silence. The marks on their faces and peeking out from under their clothes reminded me of the attack from last night and of the bloody wounds that should've been on my body. Though I was thankful that the infection seemed to have been a fleeting thing, I was bewildered as to why I felt fine.

Then the thought of Terrance took over my mind, and I joined in on the stricken sadness. Charles didn't even glance up from his cold breakfast as I sat down beside him, taking my portion from the breakfast foods in front of me. When I laid the utensils back on their platters, I noticed that there was still approximately a full portion sitting untouched.

I grimaced. It was as if Terrance was already dead. Instead of eating, I sat there staring at the tabletop, suffocating.

"We should go after him," I blurted, my eyes teary. "The royal forces already have too many cases that are unsolved. They can't search for him as well as we could!"

My mother flew out of her chair, hand clamping down on my shoulder. Her fingers pressed against the bruises, causing me to bite my lip. "Katlyn! That's enough! We aren't in good enough shape to go on a wild goose chase, and you, who conveniently left right before--"

My blood boiled, and I leapt to my feet, knocking my chair over. "You know I didn't plan for our family to get attacked by Darkbloods!" I screamed back at her, tears running down my cheeks.

"Oh really?" She continued, face red. "You left right before they attacked! You were barely even hurt, and now you're not even scratched! You're the runt who lost her magic -- you've been taken before! You are one of them--"

I saw red, and slammed my hand down into the table -- but not just into it. My palm drove straight through the wooden table, and sent food flying. It successfully cut my mother off, who began staring at me as I panted, my hand barely even red.

"I am not a Darkblood," I snarled, my eyes hard but trained on the floor. Silence met my ears, and I stomped out of the room.

I am no Darkblood.

Cursed Blood - 3.Farm Dragon.3[940 words]

I didn't hesitate. The second I entered my room, I threw everything I could into an old duffle bag I used to use for deliveries. My mother's words, the only hurtful thing she'd ever told me, haunted me as I blinked tears from my eyes and stormed out of my room, pushing past my brothers as I stomped toward the front door. I didn't stop until my father slid in front of me, planting himself in front of the door.

"What are you doing, Cloud?" He demanded, cheeks damp. "You're overreacting."

I gritted my teeth, wishing I could breathe fire. "I'm going to find Terrance."

He shook his head. "You have no way to do that," he countered, staying strong as I began glaring at him, refusing to let him change my mind. We remained chest to chest, staring each other down, until another surprise waltzed into my life.

Something large hit the ground of our farm, the sound deafening. Everyone was distracted, so I took the chance to push past my father and out the door. He tried to grab at me, causing me to burst into a run. Taking the chance once again, I sprinted in the direction of the farm. There, I spotted a large, moving form, and my eyes widened.

A large reptile was crushing the soy plants. It shook its neck and body, and my eyes popped over to the wing sprouting from its back. While the thing should've had two, it appeared that one had been ripped off.

A dragon was crushing our farm.

"What the hell?!" I shrieked, out of my mind as I ran toward the dragon. It glanced at me, studying me for a second before turning to look at the house, tail curling around its legs.

You're in trouble, tiny one, a deep voice said in my mind. I flinched, nearly face planting. I swore, the dragon was smiling. Dragons were considered to be Darkbloods who could be trained to obey Lightbloods, and therefore kept as pets by the rich. Considering how close we were to the castle, I wouldn't have been surprised if the dragon I was staring at was the property of the Queen.

"Cloud! Get away from that thing!" My mother screamed. Looking over my shoulder, I saw that she was gathered with the rest of the Rose family in front of our house, staring at the one-winged dragon.

I looked back at the dragon. It was more than twice my height on all fours, and I was over five foot five. The dragon's scales were a navy blue, and looked like thick armour for the reptilian thing. Its eyes were calculating, and a cold purple colour. Despite having one wing, the beast was well balanced and looked deadly.

Yet it hadn't attacked me. It looked rather hostile toward my family, but not me.

Ignoring my mother, I squared my shoulders toward the beast and took a tentative step toward it. Those cold purple eyes met mine, and I froze under its stare.

Don't be afraid, Gray One.

I convinced myself that the voice was non-existent, and took another careful step. My mother's voice shrieked once again as I neared the dragon.

"Cloud! You touch that Darkblood pet, you confirm you're a Darkblood traitor!"

I looked back at my family, huddled together. My brothers looked skeptical, and my father stared back at me in sadness. They didn't share her extremist views, which I was thankful for. The way they acted after losing Terrance was completely opposite from their usual selves.

"I'm not a Darkblood, Mom. But I need to find Terrance."

With that, I faced the dragon and walked toward it, hesitating once I was within a foot of its leg. Glancing up, I met its gaze, and placed a hand on his tough scales. The dragon instantly shifted, dropping his shoulder to expose a slightly flat space at the base of his neck, large enough for a human to sit on. Taking the hint, I pulled myself onto his back, unaware of what I was getting myself into.

"Darkblood!" My mother screamed, repeating it over and over, even as she began to lose her voice. It drew the attention of guards and fellow citizens, and I tensed up. The dragon underneath me sensed my fear, and roared, flaring its singular wing. I gasped as it began

running, using the wing to push itself forward or turn quicker. Guards and other Lightbloods shrieked as we barreled through the streets, the dragon holding a clear path in its mind. Terrified about what I was doing, my arm burning, I buried my face in the reptile's neck, clinging onto him for dear life.

Call me Kai, the deep voice said, ringing through my ears. I ignored it, but couldn't help thinking of the dragon as Kai.

Said dragon's path became clearer as we rode on, guards on horseback following us as we tore through the streets. The dragon looked as if it was enjoying the chase, its eyes locked on something above us. My throat closed in fear as I realized where he was heading.

Castle Mythic, home to Queen Amara of Mythira and Prince Elijah of Mythira. Seventeen years ago, I'd been saved by the Queen's men from Darkbloods.

And now, I'd be meeting her again. Years later, when both of them have grown into strong rulers. The Prince would've been around five at the time they found me in the clutches of a Darkblood, and now, he would be twenty-two. I shivered, pressing myself into the smooth scales of the dragon. Let him deal with the royals, since he was probably their pet.

At least, I thought Kai would be a good being to deal with the royals.

Until everything became personal.

Cursed Blood - 4.The Royals.4[1,044 words]

Kai didn't stop until we were in the foyer of the castle, his talons scratching the polished floors. He was panting, and the guards were furious with us as they created a tight circle, weapons pointed at the blue dragon. I nearly fainted in fear as I saw weapons aimed at me, but I was more focused on the fact that Kai had shrugged me from his back and placed me beside him, his wing curled around my front as protection.

"What's going on?" A male voice called. It was higher than the one in my head, but calming. Kai and I craned our necks to look at the top of the grand staircase in the center of the room. Standing on the first step was a man, blond with bright blue eyes, dressed in luxurious clothes. There was an amused smile on his face, directed at the dragon towering above me.

"What did you do, Kai?" The man, or boy really, since he looked so young, asked, arching an eyebrow as he took his time going down the steps. Guards sheathed their weapons before kneeling, bowing their heads. I watched them in awe, which increased when Kai bowed his head as well. After an awkward pause, I dropped down to one knee as well.

The man waited until he was in front of the hazardous dragon before chuckling. "Rise, silly people."

Exhaling sharply in annoyance, I stood up and squared my shoulders, eyeing the man. He was certainly noble, but possibly of higher stature. His relationship with the dragon made him seem like the owner, and therefore, he was one of the richest Lightbloods in Mythira.

Kai, despite being a dragon, looked amused as he glanced down at me. *You're so funny, little one*, the deep voice echoed, running through my mind.

Nope. I thought. Not happening. I'm powerless, I don't have telepathy.

The dragon huffed, looking away. The nobleman noticed the shift in moods and waved away the guards before looking at me.

"Who are you?"

I narrowed my eyes. "Cloud Rose, farm girl."

The man's eyes widened, and he glanced at Kai, then back down to me. "Cloud Rose? Storm-Cloud?"

Shocked, I crossed my arms and stared him down. "How do you know that name?" J demanded, backing up so that I was closer to Kai, who I felt safer with.

The man sighed through gritted teeth.

"I'm Elijah, Prince of Mythira."

My eyes widened, and my breath caught. Memories flooded my mind, hazy and blurry. Through it all, I could feel the cold of the outdoors on a chilly night, hear my own wails, and felt the pain of being crushed under a larger weight, as well as the pain of my bones being put back together. I didn't realize my knees had buckled until I felt Kai tugging the back of my shirt so that I'd stand. He kept the leather between his teeth as I swayed, and remained close by even after letting go. My vision swam, and my arm, where the bite mark once was, burned.

"I remember you and your mother," I choked, focusing through the pain. Elijah approached me, offering me a hand to steady myself. I declined, keeping to myself despite cuddling up to the blue dragon at my side.

He won't hurt you, Storm-Cloud.

I ignored the voice, knowing it was Kai.

"She'll want to see you, Miss Rose. My mother can help you," he added, glancing at my arm as if he could sense the burning sensation. And it was possible that he could. I had no idea what kind of Lightblood the Prince was. The Queen never let the news get out in case it could be used against them.

But, he was a Prince after all, and Kai ushered me to follow behind Elijah. It seemed as if the castle was made to fit dragons, because Kai was able to squeeze through most of it, joining me as the Prince led us to the throne room. It was a large, open room with vaulted ceilings and chandeliers, with the kingdom's banners hung along the walls. Gems laid in the walls, pillars lined with gold supported the ceiling, and large windows allowed the sunlight to pour in. At the end of the room was a raised platform with two thrones of equal size. The one on the right was made of jade with swirls made of sparkling dust. However, I couldn't compare it to the texture of the one on the left, because the throne was currently occupied.

Queen Amara was certainly beautiful. Even in old age, her hair was dark with silver streaks. There were barely any wrinkles in her perfect skin, and her eyes were a clear, intelligent green. She must've used her magic to help herself to stay that good looking.

I curtsied, my dragon companion following suit. "Your Grace."

Elijah smiled as he took the spot of the throne next to his mother, settling in like he'd probably done a thousand times. Amara looked at me with a gentle smile, her eyes soft.

"I hear you are Storm-Cloud," the Queen inquired, glancing at the dragon to my side. I nodded, inching toward Kai for support.

Do not fear her, Gray One.

I swallowed. "Yes, Your Grace. My name is Storm-Cloud Katlyn Rose, and I go by Cloud."

"Well, Cloud," the Queen smiled, "I hear there was a disturbance at your home."

A pit opened up in my stomach, and I looked away. My arm began to throb, and Elijah winced. That drew the attention of his mother, who narrowed her eyes at me. Suddenly, the air was thick with tension, and Kai shifted toward me protectively.

"We were attacked by Darkbloods, and my brother was taken," I answered confidently, though I didn't feel it. Elijah frowned, and he and his mother shared a look that I didn't understand.

"What is it?" I hissed, looking between the two of them. I didn't give a rat's ass if they were royal. I wanted my brother and my farm back, without my family suddenly going from bright sunshine people to spitting cats ready to take my eyes out.

I wanted normalcy back. Instead I had ridden a one-winged dragon to the castle, barged in, and met a Queen that saved my life when I was a baby.

I balled my fists at my side.

Terrance, you so owe me one.

Cursed Blood - 5.Power and Blood.5[1,054 words]

It was extremely frustrating when it was royals who had the answers, because they were the only people I absolutely *could not* lay a finger on. Instead, I had to stand there fuming while the Crown Prince and Queen stared at each other with grim expressions, trying to decide what to tell me and what not to.

Which meant that by the end of it, I'd still have questions no matter what.

It also didn't help that my eldest brother was taken by Darkbloods, my entire family had been attacked, said family now despised me, and I was currently befriending a one-winged dragon that sat by my side. To distract myself, I scratched at Kai's scales. The deep voice in my head, the one that belonged to the dragon without a doubt, expressed its joy with little unexpected giggles.

Eventually the two royals stopped staring at each other and glanced back at me, the leather-wearing peasant girl standing before them with a dragon looming over her. It must've been a sight to see. I raised my chin, my gaze determined, and met the eyes of the Queen.

"What is there that you are withholding, Your Grace?"

Elijah narrowed his eyes at me. "What is your gift, Cloud? Is it typical of a Lightblood?"

Sighing, I waved him off. "I don't have a gift," I answered, glancing sideways at the Queen. She still hadn't responded to my question. However, Elijah reacted to my reply -- his eyes had widened, and he was leaning forward in his throne.

"Nothing?" He parroted, staring at me through squinted eyes.

"I've never shown signs of magic, or a gift."

At that, he looked back at his mother and glared. She sighed, and lifted herself from her throne.

"Cloud," she began, approaching where I stood, "you know about the first encounter you had with Darkbloods, right?"

"Yes, Your Grace," I said, eyes narrowing. "I was stolen as a child by Darkbloods. Your guards rescued me."

The woman looked sad for a moment, but the emotion passed before she took on a blank expression. Elijah began to look as if he was a kicked puppy.

"You weren't the only one taken. Elijah was attacked as well. The Darkbloods were going to use the both of you in experiments, along with three other children."

My breath caught. "Who are the others?"

The Queen's eyes were cold as she answered. "Dead."

My mood plummeted, and I grew sad. Unfortunately, the Queen's story was far from over.

"The experiment was that the Darkbloods were giving babies their own blood. Their blood killed the first three children, and my son was rescued in time before they could inject him. But you," she told me, cutting off abruptly. Out of fear, I glanced up at the dragon towering above me.

"Me?" I squeaked, eyes falling back to the Queen's instinctually.

"You survived their experiment. You see, your gift was originally something small. You are immune to curses and poisons, as well as disease. A rock can cut you, but the most poisonous substance in the world would never hurt you," she explained, clearing her throat. Before I could interject, she continued.

"Their blood, mixed with your Lightblood, made you into something more. Legend calls your kind *Cursedbloods* or Gray Ones. It's extremely rare, because the blood of the two types would normally battle until the host is dead. But you, Cloud, have a Lightblood ability that allows you to be a Gray One."

"I have the ability to detect other's power, and use it against them. However, that's considered a curse, and I can only detect your level of power," Elijah cut in, watching my expression change. My mind was blown, and Kai was the only thing keeping me on my feet. "And if I'm honest, your power is overwhelming and bordering on excruciatingly painful."

Shamefully, I bowed my head. Things were beginning to make sense, except for one lingering question.

"Why did the Darkbloods attack my home?"

Elijah grimaced. "We think that they found out you were able to survive and were coming back for you."

My fear increased, and I began to sway. The Queen called my name, but I couldn't hear her. My vision blurred, and eventually all I could feel was the cool texture of scales.

To be honest, I was happy to faint.

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To my surprise, or rather, my new expectation, I woke up in a cell, but saw that the sun had barely moved. I had maybe been unconscious just long enough for guards to move my body. I blamed it on the Darkblood in my veins, which had increased since the second attack with the bitemark on my forearm. Even if it was meant to lead to my death, it was only adding to my strange strength.

Before long, I realized I was shaking. I was lost, imprisoned, alone.

Alone.

"Kai!" I yelled without thinking, throwing myself at the bars of my cell. Every other cell around me was empty, and the door at the end of the hall was marked with a sign I couldn't read. "Kai!" I repeated, and heard a thud above me.

Cloud, Kai's deep voice resonated in my head, *you're awake already.*

Grasping the bars in front of me, I panted and tried to focus my thoughts. I envisioned the blue dragon with cold, magnificent purple eyes.

Kai?

A wave of satisfaction that wasn't mine flooded my thoughts. *You are Darkblood.*

Scoffing, I backed away from the bars and sat on the bench pushed against the wall. *What does that mean?* I replied, though it took more effort that time.

You've always ignored me, so I thought you simply weren't receptive enough -- that you didn't actually have enough Darkblood to be considered a Darkblood. Dragons are Darkblood creatures, and therefore can communicate with other Darkbloods. Despite being Lightblood born, you have been affected enough to have the natural abilities of a Darkblood as well, Kai explained. I expected to be bored as he droned on in my head, but his strong voice was surprisingly attention-grabbing, and I stayed focused.

So I really am both? I replied, telepathy gradually getting easier for me. The taste of magic and mystery sent my head spinning -- but the answers were lifting a burden off my shoulders.

Yes, came Kai's firm response. Unquestionable. Certain.

A grin was fixed onto my face as I neared the bars of my cell.

Then it's time for me to go hunt down the Darkbloods who took my brother.

Cursed Blood - 6.Bargains for Brothers.6[1,252 words]

Hell bent on getting out of my cell so that I could rescue my brother, I demanded for Kai to get someone to free me. His loyalty shone through as I heard loud, shaking footsteps, and ten minutes later Crown Prince Elijah came waltzing into my cell block.

"Kai told me to come check on you," the Prince blurted, ignoring any formalities. I frowned, sizing him up.

"How do you two communicate?"

Elijah shrugged, waving his hands around his face as he talked as if the subject was boring and useless. "I replicate his Darkblood telepathy and use it to speak with him. Kai is one of my two dragons. He is a pet, my dragon Kyra is a mount."

I nodded, crossing my arms in front of my chest. Knowing that I had power, that I wasn't some fluke, had given me a new confidence. It didn't even stem from me being able to wield any magic -- it was just the knowledge of something running through my veins that gave me the confidence I needed.

My mother was right. I was partially a Darkblood. One of *them*. But I was also a Lightblood, and that fact alone had allowed me to survive.

My chin tilted upward. I would prove to my family that I was still their Cloud.

"I want you to release me," I blurted, "I need to save my brother."

Elijah winced. "That could be dangerous, Cloud. You don't even have magic."

"Correction," I said, cutting him off, "I can't wield my magic. Yet. But I still have it."

The Prince sighed, running a hand through his golden hair. He looked tired, as if he'd already spent hours thinking this over. Silence, much like the dreadful one in my home, took over, and I fought the urge to scream and cover my ears.

"I'll pledge loyalty to your mother afterward," I blurted again, pressing against the bars so I was as close to him as possible. That caught his attention, and his blue eyes traveled back to meet mine. "What?" He breathed, frowning in disbelief.

"You said you thought the Darkbloods attacked so that they could take me. That means I have worth. If you let me find my brother, I'll pledge loyalty to the Queen," I repeated, eyes wide as I focused on making the deal. Elijah bit his lip in thought, chewing on it as he paced back and forth in front of my cell. I didn't even know why they'd thrown me in one.

For a moment, the Prince stared at me. A memory flashed through my mind, of a pale creature and a screaming boy, but it was gone before I could focus on it. Immediately after, he seemed to make up his mind, and pulled a rusted key from his pocket. Yet I still wasn't allowed to run free, and as I stepped out of the cell, guards standing a little ways down appeared at my side.

I prefer the dragon to you, I thought at the guards, but of course it wasn't heard by them. Instead, there was a deep chuckle echoing through my brain. It brought a smile to my face as I followed the Prince in uncomfortable silence broken only by our footsteps. The guards remained with us as Elijah led us through the door at the end of the hall, and I finally glanced at the sign marking it.

Darkblood Cells.

I scowled as the door led into a massive stairwell, which we began to ascend. The door out of the stairwell was located underneath the grand staircase in the foyer, to my surprise. The guards scoffed as I looked around in amazement, as if we'd teleported. Ignoring them, I made sure to keep up with Elijah while admiring the castle's grandeur and beauty. We were once again approaching the throne room when a serving girl stepped into our path. She curtsied, smiling shyly.

"Your Highness, Her Grace would like you to meet her for tea in the sitting room," the servant told the Prince, oblivious to myself and the guards behind him.

Elijah sighed, running a hand over his face. "Could you get Miss Rose something cleaner to wear, please? You can choose anything from any spare closets."

Following his motion toward me, the maid gave my dirty clothing and tangled hair a once over and shuddered. She curtsied once again and then brushed past the Prince, taking me by the hand. I swung my head around to look back at the Prince, but Elijah was staring at the floor as I was dragged back to the staircase, and he disappeared out of my line of sight.

Kai? I reached out, allowing myself to focus as the maid guided me.

Yes, Storm-Cloud?

Sighing in relief, I rubbed my freehand across my forehead, a headache brewing. *Did I make the right decision?*

Well what decision did you make?

Frowning, I tried to push the feeling of exasperation through the bond. I felt a wave of pain, and immediately stopped my efforts.

A little gentler, dear. You're a strong telepath already. And yes, I know about what you told the Prince.

Sheepishly, I fell silent as the maid pulled me into a bedroom. It branched off of the main hallway on the second floor, and I could hardly believe that something so luxurious was a guest room. Besides the vanity, ridiculously large bed and separate bathroom, there was a large closet and an entire area for eating, with a glass table and several cushioned chairs. A chaise lounge was placed in the corner with the most left over space, and looked like the perfect spot to rest right about now. I stared at it, wondering if I could nap, while the maid bustled about.

"Miss Rose," the girl said to get my attention. I looked at her, eyebrows raised. She motioned to the bed where three dresses were laid out. "Please choose one while I prepare warm water for you to bathe in."

I watched her walk toward the bathroom before approaching the dresses, scrutinizing each one.

Kai. I don't care for any of these, I thought, waiting to see if he would receive it. A laugh answered me, as if he found it funny that I was struggling with high class fashion.

Why don't you pick one that you could imagine the Queen wearing? Kai prodded. I exhaled sharply, unsure of what to do, and stared down at the dresses. One was a red silk dress with a tight bodice that flared out into a full skirt at the waist. A swirl of inlaid crystals began over the heart, and fell around the dress like a waterfall. The next was a tighter dress overall, with a turtle neck but no sleeves. It was a light, soft green. A slit in the skirt allowed some breathing room for my legs, and the curves of my body were defined by gems placed randomly along the dress. Then, there was the third. It had a full skirt, but not a large poofy one. It was navy blue, with a silky fabric. The sleeves sat around my upper arms instead of my shoulders, and the bodice had little patterns of blue roses sewn in. Tiny gems glittered on the hem of the dress, and it fit the best out of the three.

Pretty. May not clash against my scales, Kai echoed in my mind.

It matches your scales, goofball, I joked as I peeled the dress off, standing in my undergarments, waiting for the maid. She came in minutes later and offered me a warm smile.

"Time to get you cleaned up."

Cursed Blood - 7.The Deal.7[1,031 words]

The maid was helpful as I bathed, and even more so as I got dressed. She complimented me on the navy blue dress, and handed me black flats when I declined heels. Kai was purring about matching my dress as I sat at the vanity, allowing the maid to work with my thick chocolate hair. After managing to get it back into a smooth braid, she let it hang down, giving up on anything further. She added a clip to my hair and a short necklace to my neck before deeming me ready. Feeling much more like a princess than myself, I shyly followed her out of the room, both hands laying on my skirt, prepared to pick it up if I felt like I was going to trip and make an embarrassment of myself.

Elijah, along with the one-winged dragon I came to view as a friend, were both at the bottom of the stairs as we approached. The maid skipped forward a few steps so that there was distance between us as I blushed, clutching the railing with one hand and lifting up my skirts with the other.

"Sir," the maid said softly, the Prince and dragon still distracted, and I was already halfway down the stairs. My blush increased as she pointed my way, and both of them stared at me. Elijah remained stone faced while Kai's one wing wiggled in delight, his tail following suit. The blue dragon slid toward the first step, putting his head down at my height as I stood on the second one.

"Hello," I greeted him softly, scratching the scales on his head. The dragon nudged me with his head, his scales glittering under the chandelier's light. We really did match, as if I owned him and not Elijah.

"You look ready to see my mother," Elijah interrupted, offering me a hand. Kai huffed as I took it, stepping down the last few steps. The dragon remained beside me as Elijah turned away without another word, walking toward another hallway. I laughed silently as Kai pushed me to follow along, acting playfully as if I wasn't in the middle of the castle trying to get free to go find my kidnapped brother.

If I was being honest, I would've said that I didn't expect anyone to have an entire room dedicated to tea in their house, royal or not. Then I would've been wrong, is what I discovered as Elijah approached a door with guards on either side. They said nothing as Elijah held the door open for me, and still held their silence as I looked back at the dragon.

I'll wait, Kai said, what looked like a smile appearing on his scaly face. I flashed him a real smile before heading through the door, skirts sweeping across the floor.

Inside was a decently sized room with a wall entirely made of glass. Various tables were scattered around the room, the chairs ranging from two to five around each. Closest to the

window was Queen Amara, her green eyes focused on something outside the window, a tray of tea set in front of her. Elijah wasted no time; he dragged me along behind him directly to her table. He bowed before taking a seat, and I followed suit, giving her my best curtsy.

"Your Grace," I said, making myself comfortable on the cushiony chair. I didn't dare touch the tea in front of me, placing my hands in my lap as to not disturb anything.

"I see you've recovered. Are you feeling better, Cloud?"

I nodded, giving up on making eye contact. The Queen was still focused on the outdoors, and I followed her gaze. The room was placed on the edge of the mountain, meaning we could see the Valley below. From here, I could spot the edge of my parents' farm. There was even the indent of Kai from where he'd fallen.

"I want to make you a proposal, Your Grace," I began, Elijah tensing up beside me. I shot him a confused look, but his eyes were trained on the table. Pushing aside his weird behaviour, I focused on the outdoors again. From here, I could see for miles. The beautiful landscape of Mythira was vibrant and alive, and I felt the joy I knew that the royals shared.

"What would that be?" She inquired, throwing me a sideways glance.

Twiddling my thumbs, I exhaled slowly and straightened up. "If you help me, lend me your forces, to find my brother, I will pledge my loyalty to you. Once I have control of the magic you say I have, I will pledge it to you, Your Grace."

Queen Amara faced me at that point, lips twisted into an amused smile. "Selling yourself so quickly, Cloud?"

Deep down, I knew I was rushing into it. But Queen Amara had saved me as a child. She cared, and had the power to bring Terrance back home.

If he was still alive.

Clenching my fists under the table, I balled the skirts up in my hands. My eyes trailed to the Valley down below, watching the people move back and forth. How many of them had already written Terrance off as dead?

They can teach you magic, Storm-Cloud. Make them take you in. Make them turn you into a warrior, and send you to save your brother.

Taking Kai's advice, I leveled a strong gaze on the Queen.

"I want you to teach me. Education and physical skills. *And* I want your forces to help me save my brother. *And*," I hesitated, swallowing past the lump in my throat.

"And, *if* my brother is dead... I am free from my pledged loyalty."

Her eyes were amused, but her face was blank as she processed my words. In my head, Kai was approving of my conditions, and beside me, Elijah looked less worried. Confident that I'd gotten myself something out of the deal, I relaxed my hands and posture, comfortable in the chair. It was my turn to look out the window, letting the Queen stare at my face.

"You have grown up well, Cloud. We have a deal," the Queen announced, waving her hand at Elijah.

Minutes later, I was signing an official contract and being swept away by maids once again.

Cursed Blood - 8.The Actions of Dragons.8[1,269 words]

By the time it was around supper, my headache was raging. After signing the contract that bound me to the Queen, promising that once I was trained and my brother safe and sound I'd give her my services for the rest of my life, I was exhausted and worn out. Maids dressed in simple white clothes escorted me to a new bedroom, one located in a hallway branched off from the foyer on the first floor, accessible for Kai. It was big enough for the dragon to sit in a cleared corner of the room while also housing a giant bed, vanity, closet and chaise lounge, as well as scattered useful or decorative items. Another door led to my own bathroom smaller than the one in the guest room upstairs but still luxurious.

They treat you well, Storm-Cloud, Kai pointed out, carefully sniffing the furniture so that he didn't knock anything over. I nodded, disappearing into the bathroom to shed my dress and step into a matching cloth tunic and pants. Slippers warmed my toes as I hung the dress in the closet, turning to the giant oaf of a dragon that sat in front of the door to my room.

"Are you really going to sleep here? Don't you have stables here for you and Kyra?" I asked, crossing my arms in front of my chest.

Kyra is mean to me because I am a pet. I haven't been able to tell Elijah because she threatens me into silence, but she hasn't been able to stop me from telling you because no one else knows who you are beside me and the two royals, Kai blurted, his words flowing over my mind. It took me a while to process before I frowned, hugging his leg in sympathy.

"She sounds like a brat," I said, referring to Kyra. Kai nodded, lowering his head and wrapping himself around my smaller form.

"I could fall asleep on you," I murmured, yawning. I missed the noise that was constant in the Rose household, and the smiles other common people would give me on the streets. It was the polar opposite of the castle I was in, and of the tricky balance that was making deals and trying to follow through with them. Hell, I hadn't even ridden anything larger than a horse before today, and now I was cuddling up to a dragon.

Life changes quickly, Storm-Cloud. But I think this will be good for you.

"I just hope Terrance is alright," I muttered under my breath, pouting as I hugged the dragon's leg tighter. Kai nestled into my smaller body, letting himself settle on the floor, blocking the door successfully.

Your brother will be waiting for you, dear. He hasn't perished, Kai thought, sighing. A puff of smoke left his nostrils, and I began to wonder about how much I had to learn. With my own drawn out sigh, I leaned back against Kai until I was comfortable, and shut my eyes. It was almost as if I was trying to sleep standing up.

Trying, and succeeding.

~o~o~

In the morning, I woke up to many different things. First was the feeling of a plush pillow against my cheek, squishing the extra skin in an unflattering manner. Another was the warmth from several blankets wrapped around my legs, and the realization that I was in my new bed. After that thought came the memories from yesterday, and the gasp that escaped my lungs as I looked around the luxurious castle room. Not only that, but the room was without dragon.

The second I realized Kai was gone, I shot out of bed and ran through my morning routine. I finished with throwing my hair up into a ponytail, the waves causing a giant fuzzy mess, before running outside the room, dressed in new leather clothes, expertly made and obviously ones that weren't mine. While running around the hallways, frantically searching for my dragon -- at least I thought of him as mine -- I also reached out with my mind.

Kai! Kai, where are you?!

Minutes passed, my breath coming out in huffs, of me running around. There were no guards or maids in sight, no one to point me in the right direction.

Eventually I stopped in the foyer, panting and sweaty. The front doors to the castle were wide open, and I could see guards outdoors. A flash of fire appeared, urging me to run out.

But I didn't see what I expected to see.

High in the air was a bright red dragon, its eyes golden and cunning. Below it, soldiers were sparring and practicing. Maids scuttled back and forth to perform first aid or deliver water, and a familiar blond head stood watching it all. It seemed as if most of the castle inhabitants were outdoors, as if it was a normal thing for them to spend their mornings here.

Perhaps it was, but I didn't have time to ponder that as the red dragon spotted me, sticking out like a sore thumb. I already looked nervous, sweating from my search for Kai, and I was unfamiliar to the dragon. It looked from me to the Prince, who stood not too far away, and screeched in a pitch so high everyone covered their ears. It dove, barreling toward me. Fear took control of my limbs, and I watched as fire began to spew from the dragon's mouth. I braced myself for the sizzling of my flesh, eyes squeezed shut, but it never came.

Instead, I felt someone's breath on my face. Opening my eyes, I saw that I was standing an inch away from a dark-haired man, a shield on his back. The shield was metal and wood, but every wood part of it had been burned away. The dragon had stopped its attack, confused as to why I had been shielded. My protector was panting, staring down at me.

"Are you alright?" He snapped, tone at war with his words. The sentence sounded like it was meant to be concerned, but the way he said it made me feel like I was an idiotic child.

"Y-Yes," I stuttered, noticing the silence around us. Everyone had turned to watch the attack, trying to see what had stirred the dragon into diving for me.

My protector narrowed his eyes and dropped the shield to the ground, turning away as it thumped against the hard dirt. I watched as he stomped back to a sparring match, egging his partner back into battle. As he continued his fight, everyone else followed suit. Gradually, the eyes focused on me forgot all about it.

Shaking, I turned to look at the Prince. His eyes were wide as he stared at me, the red dragon hovering above him.

"Forgive Kyra, Cloud. Please, she didn't mean to attack you, she thought you were a spy," Elijah said as he approached, his second dragon following behind him.

Ignoring his pleas, I glared at nothing, looking away. "Where's Kai?"

Stupid Kai, a woman's voice echoed in my mind. I wanted to respond, to scold Kyra, but held back from revealing myself.

"I think he went out to play in the forest again," Elijah answered, glancing around at the soldiers, "but you should start your training here with these men."

Several warriors stopped to look over at me, sizing me up the second the Prince proposed me fighting against them. It embarrassed me as several of them scoffed.

"I'm going to find Kai," I decided, turning away from the two of them. Elijah didn't stop me as I left, but Kyra, thinking she was unheard, gave me a few words to mull over.

She'll get herself killed trying to protect that cripple.

Cursed Blood - 9.Getaway Dragon.9[1,182 words]

Scowling, I began stomping down the path that spiraled around Mythic Mountain, heading off to the forests of the Valley to find Kai. Still shaken from Kyra's attack, the moment replayed in my mind until I knew every detail of what happened -- including the face and voice of the man who saved me. He haunted my thoughts, making me curious about who he was. However, I began to focus on calling out for Kai while avoiding the gazes of Valley citizens who would surely bring word to my family that I was still around. My mother would be upset to hear it, but I hoped that at some point I get to tell my brothers and father that I was alright and on my quest to search for Terrance.

My hands began shaking as I sighed, wondering about the blood in my veins. I had telepathy due to the Darkblood, and was immune to curses, poisons and most things I could want to be immune to because of the Lightblood running through me, but I couldn't figure out what other tricks could occur because of the clash of blood in my veins. Everyone around me was certain that there was more, but I couldn't figure out how to access it.

Maybe it's because I'm afraid, I thought, realizing my hands were shaking worse. My entire life, I wanted to avoid Darkbloods and trouble, and magic in general since I had none. But now, I had secret magic, two blood types, and I was in the center of a contract with the Queen and my brother had been kidnapped.

I exhaled, whistling without even meaning to. *Fear is okay, but I need to keep it under control,* I told myself, convincing myself that I would survive. First, Kai. Then I would deal with the Prince, Kyra, and my strange protector.

Oh, and my actual magic.

~o•o~

Finally, the ground leveled out, and I was approaching the Valley marketplace. Servants of the castle and regular Lightbloods ran back and forth, arms full, while stronger guards patrolled, looking out for Darkbloods. Even if I'd been raised here my entire life, I tensed every time a guard glanced my way. It looked suspicious as I walked, using my thick hair to hide my face, sticking close to the shadows of the buildings as I made my way across the Valley to the forests. Strangers sent me confused looks as they noticed several guards staring my way. I was the only Lightblood trying to hide, to become invisible, and I was

doing a terrible job. Yet I had lasted until the edge of the marketplace, where gardens tended to by volunteers began, when a guard finally decided to start tailing me. I spotted the young looking Lightblood girl jogging toward me and my heart rate spiked, even if I was working with the Queen and Prince. If my mother was still acting as strange as she was, she would accuse me of being Darkblood next time she saw me, and I didn't need those rumours.

I needed Terrance back.

Sending a glare over my shoulder at the guard, I burst into a sprint and darted into an alley, making turns left and right without thinking. Someone shouted behind me, and four pairs of footsteps pounded on the ground as guards and possibly other random Lightbloods followed. I cursed, wishing for a useful power as I did my best to lose the guards. Though they were posing a threat to me, I couldn't be mad at them -- they were trying to protect the town from the Darkbloods that had done horrible things to us.

Kai, if you're out there, I could use some advice, I thought, lungs burning as I rounded another corner. Sunlight blinded me briefly before I realized where I was; in the center of the gardens in broad daylight. Groaning, I ducked into one of the larger crowds and kept my head down as I shuffled along with them, listening to the thundering footsteps of those following me. Praying to the gods above, I maneuvered into the middle of the crowd, praying that my cover would hide me until I could find an alley to take me to the forest.

I must've jinxed myself, because suddenly, the crowd began walking back the other way, farther from the forests at the end of the city. I cursed, glancing around for the guards. They were watching the crowds, trying to locate my figure. Holding my breath, I waited until everyone else had pushed past me, putting me on the edge of the crowd, before breaking into a sprint, keeping to the main street. It was easier to maneuver than the alleyways, and I could see the forest from here. After the garden came an inn and tavern, right at the edge of town, then the overgrown forests of the Valley.

Where Kai should be.

"There!" Someone shouted. I looked over my shoulder to see guards, six of them, running after me.

Kai! I yelled in my mind, urgency making the thought feel more like a bomb. Help me! I need you to help me! Please!

Storm-Cloud?

At the sound of the deep voice echoing through my head, I nearly cried. *I'm on my way to the forest, but I was trying to avoid getting seen and drew the attention of the guards. I need a getaway mount!*

I'm coming. Keep talking, it helps me find your location.

My lungs threatened to burst as I continued pushing myself, blabbering gibberish through the Darkblood connection. It made Kai laugh through the bond as he came to find me, something that somehow lifted some of the pressure from my shoulders. People had begun to stop and stare as I ran from the guards, and I caught snippets of their whispers.

"...that Cloud...?"

"...Rose...?"

"...she get attacked by Darkbloods...?"

"...they're chasing...?"

"...Darkblood infection..."

This was a complete fail, I told myself, nearly giving up then and there until I saw a flash of blue through the trees at the end of the road. It seemed as if I was finally able to breathe properly when Kai burst through the bushes, leaves caught on his scales as he ran for me. A wave of comfort came through the telepathic connection as he got closer, pushing himself at a speed I'd never reach. He slowed down as he ducked, allowing me to latch onto the horns on either side of his head. I squeezed tight as he slid, gaining enough traction to turn and dash for the trees once again, his large form causing the guards to pause in fear. I swung around his head, screaming partly in delight as he turned. The ride was steadier as he ran on a straight path and I was able to slide down his neck, settling in the spot at the base of his neck in front of his legs and wing.

Thank you so much, I thought, holding onto his neck as he took me away from the gossiping citizens. He didn't respond, but I knew he was happy to help.

The thought made me smile as the shadows of trees appeared overhead.

Cursed Blood - 10.Stories of Before.10[1,104 words]

It wasn't long until the guards gave up, seeing as I had a dragon and went to the forest where Darkbloods could hide and ambush Lightbloods. The dragon was also a marker of wealth, which probably meant that they were going to lay off assuming I was either rich or allied to someone rich. Kai and I joked about how useful he was, despite having one wing, as he wandered into the sea of green.

"Hey Kai," I began aloud, using my voice since there was no one around to eavesdrop, "how old are you?"

There was a warm chuckle in my head before the answer came. *Older than Queen Amara by hundreds of years*, was the answer that gave me a shock. I gasped, craning my neck to stare up at his purple eyes. "Really?"

The dragon laughed again, maneuvering through a tighter section of trees. *Yes, Storm-Cloud.*

I sighed, leaning into his neck and looking up at the canopy of leaves. "Why do you never call me Cloud?"

Kai paused for a moment before answering, shaking out his wing. *I knew a dragon named Storm-Cloud once. You remind me of her.*

Smiling, I leaned my head into his smooth scales. They reflected the sunlight, causing him to glitter like a dark sapphire. "What was she like?"

An amazing fighter. Clever too, but had many brain farts when it came to the simplest things. She was almost never awkward around other dragons, and she craved a mystery.

"You sound very fond of her," I pointed out, nudging him with my shoulder. He scoffed, rolling his purple eyes.

Storm-Cloud was my older sister, Kai chuckled, shaking his head as he approached a stream, minnows swimming through the tiny bit of water. We watched them for a minute while I processed what he said.

"Is she... does she work for another kingdom?"

Kai shook his head. *Storm-Cloud was headstrong. She was never tamed, and remained a full Darkblood.*

"I'm sorry," I said, hugging his neck. "You probably miss her."

The dragon let out a sigh before continuing on, stepping over the stream. *A hundred years ago, the war between bloods wasn't as bad. I still got to see her. Now, it is different.*

Frowning, I spoke through my pout that had been on my face ever since I brought up the subject. "I thought the war was ageless."

It is, sort of. Before, it was only battles between tribes of the different bloods until Lightbloods claimed the upper hand. They should've won decades ago until their offspring began to recieve supportive power instead of offensive power. That's what made the war ageless. Lightbloods won't give up, even if Darkbloods are killing them and effectively gaining on them.

"So you and Storm-Cloud are on different sides of the war," I concluded, scratching absentmindedly at his scales, feeling their tough texture. He purred, and I noticed that he loved to nip at blades of long grass whenever he passed by them.

Yes. But I don't miss her anymore. Dragons live long lives, I may see her again or I may not. While the past was peaceful, this present is what my life has come to. I don't regret allowing the Prince to tame me, Kai admitted, craning his neck to look at me in his peripherals. *Lightblood lives may seem pointless, but it is an easier life than that of a Darkblood.*

Easier, I thought, keeping it to myself, *but not better.*

I nodded, and he continued to wander through the trees. We fell silent, my imagination taking flight as I imagined the tribes of before, where small battles were preferred to a full out war filled with assassinations.

When I was your age, Kai suddenly began, *my sister decided to teach me about Darkbloods. She took me to a village of them, filled with what you call vampires, werewolves, warlocks and witches. Women bent fire to their will, men and women became large wolves, people drained Lightbloods of blood, and other men were able to control the earth as they saw fit.*

The memory painted itself in my mind, projected by Kai. I smiled as I saw it through his eyes, people way smaller than him dancing around together as magic flashed and moved, never hurting anyone. They seemed absolutely, genuinely happy.

"Darkbloods always seemed so unkind," I confessed, staring at the ground passing underneath us. Kai moved with the grace of a slithering snake, his tail and wing never catching on anything as he slipped in between trees.

They are. But their magic brings them together. Like Lightbloods, they cherish magic. That memory is from a Festival of Blood, a Darkblood tradition when they come together to celebrate their gifts.

One day, you may be able to attend one. Even Lightblood tamed dragons and other creatures are welcomed back for the Festival. Anyone with their blood is.

"Even a halving human like myself?" I prodded, a dry laugh following it. The dragon sighed in my head, smoke coming from his nostrils as he huffed.

The Darkbloods would worship you, Storm-Cloud. Believe me, Kai responded flatly, causing me to fall silent. Perhaps the subject of Darkbloods should be kept on the past and not the present.

"How long has Kyra lived for?" I wondered, flipping to the subject of the red dragon who'd done her best trying to kill me. Kai picked up on my thoughts, and a wave of anger toward the other dragon passed through the telepathic bond.

A half century longer than I, Kai responded gruffly, snapping at a thin three. His sharp teeth dug into the bark, and he chewed on the trunk for a moment. She's a real stuck up bitch sometimes.

At that, I began laughing. His laughter joined mine in my head, and we dissolved into giggly messes as his chew toy broke in half and sparks flew from his mouth as he snickered. We continued to chat, me speaking aloud, him in my mind, the smile never leaving my face. As the day grew warmer, and my stomach rumbled, Kai began to mock me.

Let's just get home, Storm-Cloud. I have my own path up the mountain.

I nodded, settling down further and wrapping my arms around Kai's neck. The dragon shot off, sliding in between trees and clearing bushes and logs as he switched directions, heading for the Valley and Mythic Mountain. My grip tightened, but I was more excited than nervous, and I cheered as he increased in speed. Problems and thoughts melted away, until all that remained was the telepathic communication and the speed, the wind and the joy of riding a dragon, whether it be on the ground or in the air.

This felt perfect.