Cursed Blood - 11.Kai's Path.11[1,090 words]

The feeling of everything being right stayed with me as we slipped past the Valley's streets and straight to the mountain. Instead of heading for the path winding up and around, Kai simply stopped at the base of the mountain and paused, craning his neck to look at me.

Whatever you do, please. Don't. Let. Go.

I nodded, refusing to question him, my trust for him taking over as I wrapped myself around his neck and watched as talons shot from his paws. That was when I noticed the marks on the mountainside, spread out as if something had been climbing up and down the side of it.

"Holy crap," I squeaked as Kai dugged his talons into the surface, going one at a time. Gradually, the dragon began pulling both of us up the side of the mountain, as if he was a human rock climber. His wing would flap randomly from time to time to help him gain balance, and he would grunt every time he pulled himself up. I began to wonder if Kai would be stronger than Kyra -- she flew everywhere he was forced to climb. Muscles rippled through his scaly body, an impressive display as the sunlight made him sparkle like a jewel.

Magnificent creature, I thought, holding tighter as we began to make noticeable progress. The experience was risky, but took less time than traveling the path spiraling up to the top. Part of me thought that the Queen or Prince would be angry if they saw me dangling from Kai while he climbed the side of the mountain, but I also knew I couldn't care less. The dragon pulled himself up, hesitating since we'd hit a flat part of the path. Kai rolled his shoulders, wiggled his singular wing, and began to ascend the next section of mountainside.

Do you do this daily? I asked him, afraid of using my voice and attracting someone's attention.

Yes. It keeps me in shape, and helps me work around my lost wing, Kai informed me, grunting and spitting a flame out as he kept working his way up the mountain. The answer made me smile, but as I did so, I relaxed and almost lost my grip on him, my one hand slipping from neck. Kai paused, extending one wing so that my foot brushed against it and I could use it as a step to keep myself balanced as I intertwined my fingers, keeping myself in place.

Sorry, I thought to him, *I'm okay.*

The dragon nodded, letting his wing relax as he stuck his talons up into the next crevice, pulling us up even higher. I made the mistake of glancing down, and saw most of the Valley from where we were. We must've been nearly to the top, since Kai was beginning to feel relieved.

We're here, Storm-Cloud, Kai said, wing extending to keep him balanced as he heaved both of us up over the edge of the mountain, the castle coming into view. His scales glistened, and he took the time to shake himself out before lying down in the sun. Sliding off his back, I straightened and ran my fingers through my hair, brushing out the tangles. We were alone at the side of the castle, the soldiers, Prince and second dragon long gone.

Muttering about aggravating red dragons, I sat down beside Kai and soaked in the sunlight.

Until we realized that living in the castle probably came with responsibilities, which is what I came to learn as a warrior stomped toward the dragon and I. As he came closer, I realized I recognized him. He was the soldier who saved me from Kyra's attacks, but this was unknown to Kai, who had seen the sword at the man's hip and instantly rushed to my defense, curling around me and hissing like a snake.

"Kai, it's alright," I said, speaking aloud to hide the fact that I could communicate with the Darkblood creature. My dragon companion glanced at me before backing off, but he still hovered above me as the soldier approached.

"Cloud. The Prince requests that you begin training today," he told me, eyes blank as we stared at each other. "I am Gene, one of the elite warriors working for the Queen. I will test your Lightblood magic."

My heart jumped into my throat as he mentioned abilities. I had no idea who the Queen told about my condition, and even Kai could feel my fear as Gene turned and began to walk away.

Be safe, Storm-Cloud, Kai wished, watching as I hesitantly followed the warrior back to the castle.

I'll try.

~o•o~

Sitting inside the tea room, I did my best to look confident as Gene placed vial after vial on the table.

"Each of these is poison or a liquid curse. If the Queen is correct, you should be able to drink any of them and be unaffected."

I nodded, reaching for a random vial, but Gene stopped my hand with a glare.

"First, you will drink the essence of a plant that nullifies abilties," he snapped, handing me a vial with a hazy white liquid. "Then, you will drink poison. If you remain in good health, then neither of them effect you."

My eyes widened, looking from the hazy liquid to the green liquid in the second vial Gene placed in front of me. He hadn't mentioned antidotes, and I couldn't fathom putting all my faith into a power I didn't know I had. Hesitating, I stared at the vial in my hands, unable to make myself drink it.

"Cloud. You asked to train, and in return work for the Queen. You are useless without training. So if you want your brother back, drink the nullifier."

I glared at him, but couldn't help the memory of Terrance's laugh that appeared in my mind. Keeping the sound and look of him in mind, I inhaled, trying to gather my courage, and took the cork out of the top of the vial. The liquid was scentless as I put the cold glass to my lips and tilted it up. The essence burned my tongue as it filled my mouth, forcing me to swallow quickly before I began coughing. I expected some sort of sensation as it toom effect, but nothing changed.

I feel fine, I remarked, focusing on the second vial. Poison.

Terrance's smile hovered in my mind.

I took the vial, popping the cork off. This glass was even colder, and the poison was tasteless. I took my time in swallowing, feeling the possibly harmful substances go down my throat.

Then, the tingles began.

Cursed Blood - 12.Lightblood Magic.12[1,217 words]

It started in my abdomen, a warm tingling that spread through my body. Gene watched silently as I breathed heavily, the sensation completely new to me. Panic set in as I wondered if this was the effect of the poison I drank, and I felt bile rise in my throat.

However, nothing changed. The tingles came and went, leaving me feeling regular and perfectly healthy. I relaxed, eyes passing to Gene.

"Should I be dead by now?"

The guard frowned. "The nullifier takes thirty seconds to work, and the poison should knock the drinker out immediately and kill them in a minute," he said matter-of-factly. "Your power cannot be taken away, and is very much active."

The confirmation caused a large smile to appear on my face. All I really wanted was to be told I was Lightblood -- even if it was partly. For the first time I had had hope for having magic, and now I knew it was real and existed within my veins.

We continued with poisons, each one causing the warm tingles before having no effect on my body. It was almost as if I was taking shots of water, and even Gene began to looked amused as I drank vial after vial. Each one had a different colour, taste and smell, but each one ended up with the same effect; nothing. Eventually we ran out of poisons, and Gene lifted up three vials of clear liquid.

"These are the power of three other Lightbloods transformed into a poison. We already know you are immune to the Prince's power copy, but now we are going to see if you're immune to others' power as well," Gene explained, handing me the first vial. "This is the power of a young Valley woman. She has the ability to suck the energy from a person and make them sleep instantly."

Like Charles, I realized. Nodding, I popped the cork off, watching it fly to a random corner off the room, and tipped the contents of the vial into my mouth. It tasted like bile, and I nearly spat it out before I could manage to get it down. We waited ten minutes before I glanced at Gene.

"Nothing."

He sighed, handing me the next one. It was meant to freeze my vocal chords so that I couldn't speak.

I waited a minute. "Nothing, again."

The last was a scrap of power from an elderly Lightblood who could stop a person heart, and it caused my hands to shake as I forced myself to be brave and downed the contents.

Gene watched me in concern, but as the time passed, we shared a smile. To mess with him, I faked falling unconscious, tipping out of my chair and crashing onto the floor. Vials fell to the ground as Gene panicked, kneeling by my side.

"Cloud?! Cloud! God damnit, Cloud, wake up! I didn't rescue you from Kyra only to have you die from a bit of poison!"

Smirking, I cracked an eye open. "You're right," I told him, watching his eyes widen. "Nothing for that one either."

He smacked my head as I laughed in his face, sitting up. Gene offered me a hand, pulling me to my feet before turning to clean away the vials. I took a moment to study his face, noticing a few scars, the silky look of his hair, and the brightness of his teal eyes.

Blushing, I turned around to look through the window that overlooked the Valley. Somewhere outside, Kai was napping in the sunlight. Somewhere in the castle, Elijah and his mother were working. I wondered if they had as many questions about my life as I did. The sound of glass knocking against itself caused me to turn around, and I saw Gene staring at one of the vials. It was the only one with a label, and instantly, I felt tension in the air.

"Gene?" I prodded, voice shaking. The guard turned around, eyes sad as he looked up at me.

"This vial... It's labelled..," he trailed off, and I noticed his hands shaking as he reread the label.

Kai, get the Queen! Or the Prince! I thought-shouted, panicking as Gene's face went blank. Hoping my thought reached the dragon, I took a slow step toward the guard.

"Gene? What is it?" I prodded, watching as he gulped and met my gaze.

"Darkblood. You drank Darkblood," he accused, throwing the vial on the floor. It shattered, glass flying everywhere. I barely had time to react as he lunged, hands wrapping around my throat as my back hit one of the tables, arms knocking everything to the ground.

"Only Darkbloods can consume their own blood! You fiend! Kyra was right!" Gene screamed, his hands tightening around my windpipe. My hands swung wildly, trying to find anything to get him off. When they didn't find anything, I switched tactics. My Lightblood power couldn't save me now, and I'd already reached out to Kai...

Which left the Darkblood in my veins, which had increased since drinking the vial.

Gene's eyes were wild as he continued to squeeze, spots blooming in my vision. "You won't get close to our Prince, filth. And who would've known? The runt of the stubborn dragon family allied himself to the Darkblood that slipped through the cracks. Is he really tamed after all?"

My blood began to boil as I gasped for air that I couldn't get, and my vision was beginning to fade.

Was I really doing this? Getting choked to death while on some childish adventure to rescue my eldest brother from Darkbloods?

I may be doing the latter, but I am never *doing the former,* I thought, hands coming up to where Gene's were wrapped around my thought. I forced myself to focus, to search for that warmth that came with Lightblood magic.

Nothing happened, and I began to panic.

How? How do I do this?! I cried, searching for a hint of magic within my blood. The contents from the vials felt heavy in my stomach, as if they were taking effect.

No. The Darkblood is there, I realized, feeling a chill spread through my body. Slowly, I began to calm down. If Lightblood was warmth in my veins, and dark was the opposite of light...

My thoughts formed the answer, and I pulled on that feeling of a chill. Gradually, I felt my veins drop in temperature, as if ice was traveling through them instead of blood. When I had been fighting the poison, it felt a bit like fire. Now that something else was happening, it felt like frost and ice. Lightblood power was in the humans blessed with divine magic, while Darkblood was the humans with demonic blood in their veins. Witches, warlocks, werewolves, vampires -- anything you could think of.

So what would I be?

The answer came in the form of a flash of light, and suddenly I was able to breathe. Gene was thrown away from me as I was thrown to my feet, new weight in my back, rear and head. I gasped, feeling something scrape against my bottom lip.

"Demon!" Gene cried from where he was slumped against the wall, eyes wide.

Confusion radiated through me, causing me to panic further as the door was thrown open. The Queen and Prince burst into the room followed by six guards and two dragon heads peeking in.

Kai's voice rang in my ears.

Not. Good.

Cursed Blood - 13.Darkblood Form.13[1,439 words]

I threw Kai a dirty look, aware that the situation was bad since I currently had six guards pointing their swords at me, and an uncontrollable feeling of ice in my veins that was supplying me with Darkblood magic. I floundered, unable to form words as I felt a heavy pressure in my head, on my back and on my tailbone, as well as pain as something dug into my bottom lip. It appeared as if something changed physically as well as internally

when I went from regular human to Darkblood, while using Lightblood magic seemed much simpler for me.

"I-I didn't mean for t-this to happen," I spat, glancing from royal to royal. "One of the vials had--"

"She drank Darkblood!" Gene cried, furiously pointing at me. "And survived! She is one of them!"

I watched as Kyra's golden eyes narrowed at me and smoked drifted from her mouth. Kai noticed it as well, and began growling at her. Their voices rang through my mind as they began to argue.

Don't touch her! Kai yelled at her, headbutting the larger dragon. Kyra snapped at him, sparks shooting from her throat. *She is Darkblood, you imbecile! We have to kill her!*

Kai, his eyes wild with anger, snapped back at her, teeth nearly clamping down on her face. *She is no more Darkblood than you and I! She will not harm the royals!*

Kyra, using her weight, pinned Kai's head to the doorway. The humans who couldn't hear them, everyone beside Elijah and I, looked afraid as she snarled at him, flames licking at his cheek. *You have lost your place, cripple. Perhaps you belong in the grave as well.*

Kai roared, throwing her off, and I knew that they were fighting as something crashed in the hallway. I would've guessed that someone would go to stop them, but everyone was focused on me.

"We need to help Kai!" I shrieked, taking a step forward. I lurched back as a guard lunged for me, sword narrowly missing my abdomen. Something curled around my leg as I hissed like a cat, the sound relatively on point. I frowned, looking down at my leg. A black scaly tail, much like a dragon's, was wrapped around my leg.

Oh my god I have a tail, I thought, panicking as something black flashed in my peripheral vision. I twisted, gasping at the black feathery wings, like dyed angel wings, sprouting from my back.

No wonder they think I'm a demon, I thought, feeling for the pressure on my head. My fingers brushed against something hard like bone, and I ran my hands along it.

Horns. Horns were sprouting from my hairline, probably a similar dark colour to my wings and tail. My hands went to my mouth, finding two sharp fangs among my upper teeth.

I looked at the Queen, helpless. She looked worried as well, unable to call off the guards without exposing my secret.

Then, a different male voice appeared in my mind.

Cloud?

I froze, eyes passing to the Prince. *Elijah?*

It worked, he thought back, a smile appearing on his face. *I was worried the power copy wouldn't work with you.*

I don't know what to do, Elijah. I can't turn this off.

Just do the opposite of whatever you did to call on your Darkblood, he told me, holding his mother's hand. The guards were frozen, waiting for the Queen's command, while also focused on the dragons fighting outside. Gene watched his fellow warriors as if they were stupid, continuing to scream at them.

I exhaled, eyes shutting.

I don't want the fire of Lightblood, or the ice of Darkblood. Let the power go, I thought, imagining the magic of either blood resting calmly in my bloodstream. Slowly, I felt the tingles throughout my body.

Calm down. You are neither, and both. Calm down. Find yourself, the powerless part of you.

My breath came in slow beats, and a memory of my family came to mind. My mother was conveniently away during the time of the memory, meaning it was just my brothers and father there. It caused me to smile, and I felt the horns slowly retracting as well as my fangs.

After that came the memory Kai shared with me of his sister. Her scales were a lovely sky blue, and her eyes were silver like a fine necklace. The bond between them from centuries ago caused me to relax enough for the ice in my veins to melt, and to be replaced by the feeling of regular human blood. The tail was gone soon after.

Then came the wings. The largest part of my Darkblood half, apparently. It took much more effort to put those away, to calm down enough while several weapons were pointed my way.

But it happened. The wings disappeared and my eyes shot open, spotting the twin smiles on the faces of the Queen and Prince. The guards, unsure of what happened, slowly sheathed their swords, and Gene's cries had faded.

"Kai needs help," I blurted, breaking the silence. The guards glanced from me to the Prince, who motioned for them to go to the dragons. They complied, prepared to get a little burnt while separating the two. A wave of gratitude flowed from Kai to me, and I

nearly collapsed with relief. My knees buckled, and I felt myself go limp, but before I hit the ground, there were delicate hands wrapped around my arms, holding me up.

"Cloud," the Queen said gently, her voice reminding me of flashes of memories from when I was a baby. "Please stand up."

Collecting what little energy I had left, I gathered my legs underneath me and pushed myself to standing, leaning on one of the undisturbed tables. I met the Queen's sad blue eyes and felt a wave of guilt.

"I am so sorry, Your Grace. He was testing the limit of my Lightblood power and accidentally gave me another dose of Darkblood. He realized it soon after and tried to kill me," I explained; watching as the Prince went to help Gene up. They hobbled toward us, but the guard refused to approach me.

"I have every right to kill a Darkblood monster," Gene spat, "how dare you come into this castle like you are our ally!"

I winced, looking down at the tablecloth. The last bit of the story hung on the tip of my tongue, and I spat it out in shame.

"I figured out the difference between the two powers and have some control over it now. But to find out how Darkblood magic worked in comparison to Lightblood magic, I did something that turned me into... whatever that was."

A gentle hand covered mine, and I met the eyes of the Prince. He smiled at me, eyes sympathetic. "Cloud, it's rather simple," he told me, meaning the form. "Darkbloods' demon blood makes them something other than human. Witches, vampires, sirens, spirits, everything else. Your Darkblood half must be giving you that form."

"She's a demon?!" Gene shouted, flying at me. The Prince side stepped, putting himself in between us, causing the man to back down.

"Yes. Partially. It looks like she's some sort of tainted angel, at least when she is using her Darkblood. Otherwise, she is a normal Lightblood just like us, Gene. She's here to train and get help to find her brother, *who was taken by Darkbloods,* and then she will be pledging herself to the Queen. She is a friend."

The Prince's words left nothing up for discussion, and he turned to his mother, disregarding Gene's sputters. "I think we should let everyone working in the castle know who Cloud is, but refrain from spreading it to the citizens. For now. It may make things easier."

The Queen nodded, her eyes searching my face before she patted my shoulder, turning to the door. Gene, throwing a glare my way, scrambled after her as she left. Outside, I could

hear the guards scolding the two dragons. Sighing, I pulled myself up straight, rolling out my shoulders.

"Cloud," Elijah said, grabbing my attention. I gave it to him, focusing on his blue eyes.

"Yes, Prince?"

He sighed. "Don't worry about what happened here. Just keep your head down and make sure you and Kai stay out of trouble. We'll protect you, and I can guarantee that my mother has already sent scouts to find Terrance."

My face lit up. "Really?!"

He smiled this time, nodding as my excitement grew. Without thinking, I began to cheer, and laughed like a young girl.

When I focused again, I noticed a look in the Prince's eyes that I hadn't seen before. Blushing, I turned my face away.

"I'll be on my way," the Prince forced, almost rushing to the door.

And as he passed through it, I smiled.

Cursed Blood - 14.Reputations.14[1,135 words]

That night, I slept in my bed from start to finish while Kai rested in the stables, patched up from his fight with Kyra. Nothing was too damaged in the hallway, only scorched. The dragons had mostly bitten each other and blown fire, meaning that Kai was bleeding from his side, leg and neck, with a burn covering most of his tail and one of his hips. Kyra, supposedly, had bite marks all around her shoulders and near her face, and a burn on her leg, but I didn't think either of them had won in the end. Neither had I, with my busy, hectic day. Trouble seemed to be following me in my shadow, and it exhausted me. I missed my brothers and the farm.

But another part of me thrived off the adventure. I was anxious, but excited, and my blood and power felt charged and ready for use. The thought of learning to fight kept me up for a while, and I laid back on the chaise lounge with a book given to me by one of the maids for multiple hours before finally being calm enough to sleep.

In the morning, a maid came in and ordered me to bathe before 'fixing' my hair as she said and dressing me in a casual, flowing baby pink dress. It was comfortable and surprisingly pretty as I checked myself in the mirror, glad to see no horns, fangs, wings or

tails. All I had was a thick brown braid, excited hazel eyes, lovely tanned skin and regular human teeth.

And thank the gods for that.

After getting me ready, the maid escorted me to the 'unofficial' dining room, which was next door to the tea room and had an identical wall of windows but larger, nicer tables. Already seated was the Queen, Prince, a woman and three men, all four of them new to me. I curtsied before beelining for the first open seat.

"Cloud," the Prince said, interrupting my rush for the chair, "your spot is here."

I followed to where he was pointing, spotting the open space. The Queen sat at the head of the table on one end, and the Prince sat on one side of her across from one of the men. The seat next to him was empty, with the woman sitting on the other side of the empty spot and the other two men sitting with the third on their own side of the table.

"Oh, of course," I blurted, walking around to their side of the table and gathering my skirt before sliding into the open seat. The woman smiled, her teeth perfect little squares.

"Cloud," Queen Amara began, "these are my four advisors. The woman is Lillian Garcia, and these men here are Iain Sampson, Jason Taylor and Michael Wender." She pointed each one out, with Iain across from Elijah, Jason across from me and Michael sitting opposite of Lillian. Each of them shot me a welcoming smile, and I began to recognize them by their reputation in the Valley.

"'Lillian the Generous'," I quoted, "'Iain the Brave, Jason the Talented and Michael the Clever.' The Queen's ex-elite." My respect had instantly increased for the people around me as they shrugged, confirming their status while trying to downplay themselves. "You're all legends down in the Valley," I told them, staring at Jason. He'd always been my favourite of the four.

Lillian sighed, a small smile on her lips. "I'm glad. A girl doesn't work for years to get nothing out of it," she joked, playing with a lock of her straight raven hair. Her eyes were a playful brown, glittering as she laughed. Across from her, Michael rolled his eyes. I could instantly detect that the four were old friends, and found myself laughing when they did.

As breakfast began, platter after platter of food was brought out for our enjoyment. We continued chatting, a general light hearted nature sticking around the table.

But all good things come to an end.

As we were finishing up, I was the last to stand, and happened to bump into a maid who had awkwardly reached over my shoulder for a platter. When my shoulders connected with her arms, she lost her grip on the silver platter in her hands which had been holding

fresh fruit and was now covered in their juice. The platter flipped, landing in my lap and causing a loud noise as it smacked the edge of the table. I stifled a laugh as the smell of pineapple drifted up from my skirt, and rose up before turning around.

Only to see the maid on her knees, blubbering about forgiving and mercy. It shocked me, considering I could feel the fear she had of me. Misunderstanding *why* she was afraid, I bent to help her to her feet, but the woman screamed and pulled away as if my touch burned her.

Tears dotted my eyes as I heard her whimper something about Darkbloods. Guilt washed away my confusion and I backed away, crossing to the other side of the table so that the woman could gather herself. The others looked pained, unable to defend me since rumours about my frightening Darkblood form were traveling through the castle after they announced my presence. At this rate, the rumours were probably all over the Valley as well. If they reached my mother, she would do her best to confirm them.

Or would she defend me?

I bowed my head, rushing for the door in a flurry of shame and pink fabric. No one stopped me as I slipped through, holding my palms against my eyes to keep from crying as I rushed through the hallways, reaching out with my mind.

Kai, I thought, my inner voice unaffected by my emotions like my outer one would've been, *how do I get to you?*

There was no response. Either he was asleep, or I wasn't sending my projection with enough power. Gritting my teeth in frustration, I wiped at my eyes before looking around me, spotting nothing familiar.

But while I was seeing nothing, I also noticed a figure at the end of the hall, seemingly facing me. It stood stock still, with no emotion.

"Hello?"

Storm-Cloud Rose, a chilling voice said in my head, causing me to jump. *Your leisure time is up, Cursedblood. You are no longer free.*

What do you mean? I replied, trying not to come off as aggressive as I stared at the form.

The Gray War has nearly begun, child. Find who you trust most before it happens, the figure warned before taking a step toward me, its face coming into the light. Unlike its chilling voice, the figure was a human girl with ordinary features and no extra scary ones. *You will have to give up more than you expect if you wish them to live.*

Your brother is just the beginning.

Cursed Blood - 15.Dmitri.15[1,090 words]

The second the last thought reached my own head, the girl vanished into thin air, leaving me with a cold feeling in my gut. She added to the horrible experience that was my morning, and I couldn't say I was happy about that. Swatting at the air where she once was, I began to growl in frustration.

"Not going to become a werewolf as well, are you?"

I jumped, whirling around. Behind me was another tall warrior, a scabbard across his back with a broadsword sheathed inside. His body was layered in leather, and his hair was dark like Gene's and reached his collar. Light taupe eyes stared back at me as I gawked at yet another attractive man in the castle.

Shit, I thought, scolding myself as I blushed and looked away. *I shouldn't be finding anyone attractive.*

"Miss Cloud?"

I glanced back, raising an eyebrow. "Just Cloud please."

He shrugged. "Alright. Well, Cloud? Are you a werewolf too?" He prodded, the ghost of a smile on his lips as he waited for a response.

I scowled, crossing my arms in front of my chest. "Only Darkbloods are werewolves," I snapped, wishing I could disappear.

The man shrugged again, but this time the grin was visible on his face. "And you've been rumoured to be a strong halfblood with a scary Darkblood form. So? Are you a werewolf?"

Looking away, I clenched my fists and focused on keeping my blood pumping, refraining from letting it go cold, as if there was a switch somewhere inside me I was pinching in place to keep myself Lightblood.

"No," I answered through gritted teeth, "I'm only a halfblood--"

"Gray One--"

"And therefore I don't have any usual Darkblood forms. For them, it isn't even a form," I pointed out with a childish huff, staring at the floor. The man shifted, coming closer. I tensed, prepared to lash out at him until he grabbed my arm, making me look at him. His grip was firm, but gentle at the same time.

His eyes glittered with mischief as he examined my face. "Why don't you enjoy being both? It seems like an easy way to become powerful," he said, watching my expression darken.

"It's also an easy way to make enemies. People who want to hurt you. And you begin to lose things, which makes you into a person who is always going to have to fight and search for what's theirs. And above everything else," I said, my voice deadly quiet, "there's the risk of losing control. Of letting out the side you don't know anything about."

The man paused for a second, processing my words and the pain laced through them, before taking my hand and dragging me down the unfamiliar hall.

"If you're most afraid of losing control, then we should do our best to give you control," he concluded, pulling me into a room with high ceilings and thick plated walls. "My name is Dmitri, and I'm the Darkblood specialist for the Queen."

I narrowed my eyes. "Are you going to experiment on me?"

Dmitri shook his head, laughing. "That may be interesting, but no. The Queen planned for me to start training you when she finally got you under control, but I figured we could start now."

Under control? I wondered, watching as he pressed a certain spot on the walls and something slid away to reveal weapons inside. Dmitri frowned, closed the secret compartment, and opened another to find wooden versions. As he pulled them out, testing each one, I called out to him. "What do you mean by under control?"

The man sighed, taking off his scabbard before answering. "Everyone has noticed that you and the crippled dragon spend most of your time together. It prevents you from having the time to learn."

Chewing on my lip, embarrassment flooded me as I realized he was right. Sheepishly, I smiled. "I should alologize to her," I thought aloud, frowning at the floor.

"Don't sweat it. Plus, she's going to be teaching you etiquette, a guard will teach you to fight normally, someone will be testing your Lightblood abilities more, and I'm here to work on your Darkblood half," he said, listing them off on his fingers. "It would've been a lot for your first few days."

I nodded, glancing at the pile of weapons. It was a mound of various daggers and swords with bows here and there. Raising an eyebrow, I watched as Dmitri selected one of the longbows, a weapon that was excessive even in a room this big.

"What are you doing?" I questioned, holding up my hands so that they were beside my ears. The man grinned, testing out the resistance of the weapon as he pulled his arm back.

He looked it over before stretching it back, the wooden arrowhead aimed at my chest. Naturally, I knew even the wooden arrow could and would kill me.

Dmitri refused to answer my question, and I was at arrow point while in a room alone with him. Lightblood power -- at least not mine -- wouldn't save me in this situation. My mind drifted to the thick, protective surface of the wings that had sprouted from my back. Tainted. Black angel's wings.

I glared at Dmitri as my blood ran cold, as if ice cubes traveled from organ to organ instead of blood cells. Gradually, I felt the tingling that signaled the awakening of the power in my veins, and I heard a split of clothing as wings sprouted from my back, a tail poked out from underneath my skirts, the weight of horns was suddenly on my forehead, and fangs pierced my lips. The temperature around me dropped, and I could feel my loose control of my own power as my tail swung wildly and my wings twitched. My lack of use of these talents and powers had led to me being extremely out of control.

Dmitri's lips twitched into a smile. "Ready, Darkblood?"

I gasped, fangs making the noise similar to a hiss as the arrow flew toward me, Dmitri's aim on point. Panicking, I pulled my arms over my head and felt something warm layer on top. Seconds passed before I lifted my head, dropping my arms.

I heard Dmitri's murmur of approval as I stared up at the feathery black wings surrounding me. As if they had a mind of their own, the wings had wrapped me in a protective caccoon that the arrow couldn't pierce. They gradually moved away, folding in behind me as I straightened, feeling my grip on the reins of my power tighten.

It was all a test.

All I have to do is pass.

Cursed Blood - 16.Tricks.16[1,273 words]

It wasn't long until I got a feeling for what I was doing. Try not to die, and my powers would take care of it. At this point, Dmitri had thrown or shot everything imaginable at me. Part of my power was the fact that my extra appendages seemed to know how to use my energy to heal themselves -- every time an arrow pierced my wings, the wings themselves forced the arrow out, causing it to clatter to the ground, before the feathers melted and stitched themselves back together to heal the pierced spot. It was the same with axes, daggers and swords that Dmitri threw my way. My tail flicked back and forth as Dmitri and I stood across from each other, glaring. At this point, I had a sliver of control and held my wings up at my sides, spread out and ready to react. Whenever I panted, it sounded like hissing, and my horns were sharply pointed and waiting for me to headbutt something. My fingers curled around the dagger in my hand; I had caught it in a moment of instinctual movement that I knew came from the Darkblood in my veins.

Dmitri watched me with cautious eyes, unsure of which side had more control. At this point, I was unsure too.

Exhaling, the sound a hiss, I dropped the dagger at my feet, relaxing my wings.

Presenting him the opportunity -- a trick -- that he took.

He performed a double throw of two axes, the sharpened blades (he was also switching between the wooden and the real weapons) glinting under the lights as my wings extended, slapping one axe out of the air while I allowed my muscles to perform their own magic, and I caught the handle. Quickly, I bent to grab the dagger, holding both in my hands as I readied myself. Dmitri was still unsatisfied, and grabbed one of the steel swords that had one of the sharpest edges. He swung it with both hands, testing it out, before facing me.

He wants a real fight, I concluded, wings flaring, tail curling around my leg. *Fine. Time to see what Darkbloods can really do.*

His grin turned deadly as he lunged for me, quicker than I'd seen anyone move. I hissed, actually meaning to for once, hurtling backward. The Lightblood warrior continued to advance, sword always barely missing me. Snarling, I took a window of time when he was readying himself for another strike to lunge forward, dagger flying for his shoulder.

But it was his turn to trick. He jabbed with the sword, and I expected to feel the pierce of it driving through my gut when I instead felt weightless. A gust of wind caused a small burst of dust as I was taken up into the air, dodging the jab. My wings were flapping, carrying me to ceiling.

"Finally," Dmitri exhaled beneath me. He had moved so that he had no view up my skirts, thankfully, and was staring at the black wings at my sides. They kept in perfect rhythm, and a certain part of my brain had a sliver of control over them. It was like a Darkblood's mind was inside of my own. I took control of it, gently letting myself drop before catching myself.

Part of me wanted to jump back into the air, but I wasn't quite sure how good at flying I was and wasn't prepared to practice. I glanced at Dmitri, noticing that the weapons had been cleared away.

His eyes met mine, his grin contagious. "First step of being a Darkblood? Using your form. Then we can work on magic."

I frowned. "Magic? I thought this was it," I said, gesturing to the horns on my head.

The man rolled his eyes. "Lightbloods have a form; their regular body. Then they have their magic. Then there are the Darkbloods; who's form can vary based off of their magic. There's rumours that Lightbloods used to be less human and more monster as well,"

Dmitri replied, looking slightly disappointed by my lack of knowledge about the two species I was apart of.

They're really only one, I thought, correcting myself. If I was going to be both, mine as well get back on track of equality -- though I did pick a side already.

Now I was frowning, at war with myself. Part of me felt like I should be giving both Lightblood and Darkblood sides a chance, while the other part of me was arguing about how Darkbloods were monsters.

Kyra and Kai aren't monsters. One's a bitch, but not a monster.

"Cloud?" Dmitri said, suddenly closer to me as I broke out of the reverie I'd been in.

"Yes?" I responded, unsure of why he was frowning as well.

He looked me over for a second, silent. "You were whimpering," he finally replied, eyes flicking to mine. "What's on your mind?"

Exhaling, I waited for my power to thaw and disappear, the extra parts retracting. I panted, since the whole morning had drained my energy, and I still had the burden of Terrance and mysterious girls on my shoulders.

"I'm not ready for any of this," I admitted, meeting his strong gaze with my own weak one, "but I have to be. Otherwise, people get hurt. Focus on getting me trained enough to save my brother. Then we can talk about feelings."

With that, I turned for the door, head bowed. I needed to focus. I needed my brothers, and the feeling of the breeze through my hair as I tended to the farm, of the sun burning my back in a way that was familiar. Tears gathered in my eyes as I fumbled for the door knob.

"Cloud," Dmitri sighed as I gave up, punching the door in frustration and laying my forehead on the cooler surface. "Cloud, stop."

I punched it again, feeling my knuckles scrape the wood. "Cloud," he snapped.

Stopping, I turned around to glare at him, my eyes red rimmed and my cheeks already puffy as tears dropped from my lashes to my cheeks. Dmitri sighed again, crossing his arms in front of his chest, watching me cry silently.

"Storm-Cloud Katlyn Rose. This world is based off the blood in your veins, and really, nothing else. You have power in your body, in your DNA, and you will learn to use it. You aren't meant to look so pathetic. Chin up, princess, otherwise you are going to fail and get people killed anyway. Right now, they see you as a bomb waiting to explode when you lose control. And there's no way in hell I'm going to train a bomb so that it can kill *more* people when it explodes in the end.

"So we won't train until you can get out of your head and talk about whatever makes you whimper aloud and stare into space. These problems need to be dealt with, and your mind needs to be clear before we attempt to train you."

His eyes were hard as he stared me down, but gradually the tears stopped falling. The words that came from his mouth weren't sugar coated or kind overall, but they did the trick, and I sniffled before nodding.

"Go find the Prince. I'm sure he'll know what class you have next, kid."

I glared at him. "Kid is a bit far," I snapped. "Just because I'm new to this doesn't mean you get to be rude and demeaning."

Dmitri smirked before pushing past me, throwing the words over his shoulder.

"Here's my deal, kid. When you can prove yourself, I'll stop calling you kid. Kid."

Rolling my eyes, I clenched my fists and stared at Dmitri's back in determination as he strolled down the hallway.

We'll see who's a kid.

Cursed Blood - 17.Royal Visit.17[1,163 words]

It wasn't long until I found the Prince. All I had to do was ask a trembling maid where I could find Elijah and the woman skittered off, returning with the blond man in tow. He smiled at the shaking woman before dismissing her, turning to me with a grin.

"What can I do for you, Cloud?"

"Two things," I told him, holding up two fingers. "One; help me schedule my lessons. I'm ready to start focusing. Two; take me to my family. I should speak with them." I chewed my lip, then stuck up a third finger. "And if you don't mind, I'd like to see what your search parties have already come up with."

Elijah paused, thinking it over, before sighing. "We'll leave in fifteen minutes. Clean yourself up."

He turned to leave, but I lunged forward and grabbed his wrist. "We?"

The Prince tensed, and I slowly let his hand go. He returned it to his side, face forward as he begrudgingly answered.

"Your parents -- your mother, I suspect -- deserve a visit from a royal who knows what's right."

His words processed in my mind as he walked away, footsteps heavy. I collected myself, pulling my hands into my chest before running to my room. *Mom can't be in trouble with the Prince. She didn't mean to... To be mean,* I thought, pulling on leather clothing similar to the ones I wore when Kai first stumbled upon our little family. After brushing back my hair, ridding it of pieces of wooden weapons, I tied it back and rushed from the room. Gathering outside the castle was the Prince and three other warriors, free of the guards' uniform, all on horseback.

"Is that her?" One asked, glancing from me to the Prince. Elijah looked over and nodded, eyes quickly passing to something else. The warrior who spoke slid down from his horse, handing the reins to a comrade.

"Hello, Miss Rose. I'm Travis," the warrior said, taking my hand and bowing above it. Flustered, I curtsied in response.

"It's nice to meet you, Travis."

The other two frowned before following suit, the Prince ending up with three sets of reins along with his own. Travis moved to the side to allow his friends to greet me, a strange curtesy that surprised me.

One with shocking platinum hair gently kissed my knuckle as he bowed. "Miss Rose, you're very lovely. My name is Shade."

The one next to him, with the blackest hair I'd ever seen, grinned and pulled me in for a hug, which caused me to tense before awkwardly hugging back. "I'm Andrew! You seem like a good person, Cloud!"

Blushing, I curtsied for both of them before glancing at the Prince who was staring at his horse's mane. I scowled, Travis laying a hand on my shoulder. His hair was similar to mine in colour, and his eyes were a warm brown shade. "You will be riding with me," he informed me, leading our little group back to where the Prince had their horses. The three warriors mounted up before Travis extended a hand to me. Something clicked in my head, unknown to me, and when I took his hand, prepared to awkwardly climb up, I easily jumped up and settled in side-saddle.

"Impressive," Travis murmured as he nudged his horse into movement, unable to see my bewildered look as we followed the others to the top of the path leading down Mythic Mountain. I sighed, smiling and watching the Valley passed by.

It was peaceful enough to distract me from the events to come.

~o•o~

Riding through the marketplace on the way to the Rose farm was a hard experience. People stared at our group, since the boys each had some sort of marking of being royal, and most of them recognized me. Some knew me personally and looked worried -- others knew me as the supposed halfblood daughter of Alice and Jeremy Rose, an evil spawn of the devil. I kept my eyes forward, imagining Terrance, Warren and Charles. Picturing the day when I found Terrance and got revenge on Darkbloods.

I ignored the snippets of their conversations, my blood tingling with warmth as we rode by. It occured to me that some of them may attack, but I didn't expect them to try to use their power on me while I was riding with the Prince.

Instead of causing a scene, I kept my head down and focused on the sound of horse hooves on the pavement as we trotted closer to the home that I loved.

When the cabin-like household came into view, I began to tear up. Travis sent me a gentle smile over his shoulder, pulling up beside the Prince as the four boys guided their horses to the side of the road in front of the Rose home. I slid down before the rest of them, taking shaky steps toward the front door. I felt out of place as I raised my hand to knock, knuckles scraping against the rough door.

Warren, with dark bags under his eyes and greasy, unwashed hair, opened the front door with his eyes on the ground. Seeing him so distraught caused my tears to fall, and I jumped at him, arms wrapping around his waist. I heard him gasp before the air was squeezed out of me, his voice rough as he whispered my name repeatedly, crying as well.

"Warren, what's going on?" A scared voice belonging to Charles asked. Warren and I separated enough for me to look around him at the sibling I resembled the most. Charles' broke down instantly, falling into my arms in a puddle of tears. The scene caught my father's attention, who appeared with my mother in the doorway to the living room.

"Kids? Who's there?" My father asked, unable to see me squished between my larger brothers. They moved so that my parents could see me; dressed in high quality leathers, clean and well taken care of.

"Hi, Dad," I choked, unable to greet my mother. It didn't matter -- my father was already wrapping his arms around myself and my brothers, suffocating us all as the air was squeezed from us and our tears nearly choked us. We stayed like that for several minutes before I heard the four boys arrive to the front door and I pulled away, wiping my eyes and cheeks. Charles and Warren clung to me as I turned to look at my mother.

"The Prince is here with three of his warriors to speak with our family," I told them, but it was directed at her specifically. She was still acting strange it seemed as she disappeared into the living room, leaving me to escort the Prince and warriors inside, my brothers and father trailing behind us.

They all brushed past me as I hesitated outside the door, staring into the room I'd spent so much time in.

Andrew held back from the others, stopping beside me. He still looked ridiculously happy.

"You can do this, Cloud," he told me.

Then he pulled me inside.

Cursed Blood - 18.Permission.18[1,270 words]

We awkwardly settled into the seats, my family looking a little less grim now that they knew I was alright. The elephant in the room was suffocating me, but thankfully it was Elijah who began the conversation.

"Cloud will be searching for her brother with support from the crown. Her circumstances have led her to sign a contract that binds her to the Queen, so please know that you are no longer guardians of your daughter. She is one of the elite," Elijah informed my parents, my brothers staring back at me in shock. I averted my eyes as he continued. "Your daughter has a very special blood condition and will become a highly educated and trained worker for the Queen, and will lead a good life. But there are extra details for when it comes to your son, Terrance--"

"Wait," my mother interrupted. "'Special blood condition?' What does that mean?"

Elijah grimaced, gritting his teeth as he straightened in his spot. "Cloud is a special Lightblood that is valueable, and therefore will be kept safe by the rulers of Mythira. All else is extra that you don't need to know."

Her eyes met mine, and it was like she'd gained Terrance's ability. For a split second, I swore she could read my mind, her own coming to the conclusion that she'd been right about me, her supposed Darkblood daughter. After all, she was right, in a way. I was halfblood.

"Anyway," Elijah hissed, breaking our stares as my mother and I had a silent war. "Back to the subject. Cloud is now an elite, so she will be able to visit you on her own time, most likely around once every two weeks if she wishes. But this all changes depending on Terrance."

"Have you found my twin?" Warren blurted, edging to the end of his seat. He and Charles had been staring at me in worry, but the mention of Warren brought their focus onto Elijah, their concentration level nearing lazer-focus.

Elijah shook his head. "We have leads though. Cloud will be going with the Queen's men to find him. This is where things get tricky."

The Prince exhaled, closing his eyes before opening them to reveal sympathetic ones. Shade rolled his eyes, though my family didn't notice. I frowned at him, and he smirked for a split second.

"If Terrance is found alive and returnes safely, the agreement stays intact. However, if he is found dead, Cloud will return to your home under your care."

My mother muttered something, causing my stomach to curl in fear. The Prince's eyes narrowed in on her, and I swore I could see the smoke coming from his ears. My father and Warren, who sat on either side of my mother, looked horrified as they swung their heads around to stare at her. Charles tensed from where he was on a single chair, looking angry at my mother. It made sense; he and I were like two peas in a pod.

"What was that, Mrs. Rose?" The Prince asked, voice cold as he stared at her as if he planned on throwing her in a cell.

My mother, on the other hand, was a proud woman of confidence. She met the Prince's gaze without fear. "You can keep her until you see her worthlessness and decide to throw her to the wolves, Your Royal Highness," she repeated, clearly emphasizing a few points in defiance. My heart hurt as the words struck home, causing shame to flood my cheeks.

"I'm going to excuse myself," I blurted, jumping to my feet and leaving the room as tears ran down my cheeks. I went to the one place I knew would be empty; my own room. Inside, the place had been ransacked as if someone had tried to take anything of value. I shook with bitterness and rage as I lowered myself onto the bed, sitting with my back against the thin wall. Even from here, I could hear the Prince yelling at my mother. She shouted back eventually before stomping out of the house, leaving Elijah fuming as Travis, Andrew and Shade explained the rest of the situation to the men in my family. Slowly, the tension in the house melted away, and I felt myself breathe normally as I forgot all about what my mother had said and dried my eyes.

My one question left was what had changed between us. It was sudden -- Terrance was taken, then my mother turned on me.

Did she suspect me all along?

Was it an act?

The thought hurt, but not as much as the words she hadn't hesitated to say. Gathering myself, I pushed off from the wall and got to my feet with surprising grace, heading for the door.

Except Shade was suddenly there, smiling at me. It wasn't a sympathetic smile. It was one that held secrets and probably mischief, and for some reason, it made my heart flutter.

"Cloud," Shade said gently, "you should come talk to your brothers. They're being crazy."

Frowning, I followed him back to the living room. Travis, Elijah and my father shared a couch while my two leftover brothers and Andrew stood chest to chest, my brothers red in the face. Shade and I walked in on them yelling before everyone turned to face me in sync.

Oddly creepy, I thought, lifting an eyebrow. "Are you guys alright?" I asked, voice still rough from crying. I found it funny how I was asking them despite what had just happened.

Charles ran to me, wrapping his arms around my waist and hugging me to him. "They won't let us join you! Even though we're going to be knights!" He shrieked, voice piercing my eardrums. It took me a second to understand his words before I pushed him to arms' length, using one hand to hit his cheek lightly.

"This isn't an adventure Charles! You and Warren don't belong in danger where Darkbloods lurk at every corner," I scolded, anticipating his response.

"But I can't let my closest sibling die," he whispered back, raising his voice so that the others could hear his next words. "And as someone who is going to be a soldier, I can't let my sister who doesn't belong near Darkbloods go either.

"Not alone," he finished, adding the last statement with the cross of his arms. I scowled, looking at my noble escort group. From the looks on their faces, I knew they were leaving it up to me.

"Dad?" I prodded, looking away from my brothers at the man with gray in his hairline.

My father shrugged. "My children have always been strongest together. If it wasn't for your mother, I'd go too."

I sighed, rubbing my hands over my face. Mom was a problem. If she knew that her sons left for me, she'd probably claim that we were all Darkbloods.

"I can't let that happen. There's too much you don't understand," I told them, fists clenched behind my back as I did my best to bite my lip and keep back what I wanted to tell them. Honesty was clawing at me, and the need to show them what I was dealing with nearly sent me over the edge.

But the Queen and Prince didn't want citizens to know. They didn't want their Lightblood worshippers to know that they could've all been tainted like I was.

Charles looked heartbroken as I stepped back, glassy eyes on the floor.

"One day, I'll make you understand. But let me bring back Terrance first."

Warren, from across the room, cleared his throat.

"If you get hurt Cloud... so help me gods I will tear the Darkbloods apart."

Meeting his eyes, I felt myself almost lose control then and there.

Instead, I smiled.

"Please do."

Cursed Blood - 19.Branded.19[1,363 words]

Soon after that, I was back on Travis' horse with my eyes shut as I did my best to comfort myself. My goodbyes were fulfilling, but painful, and left my heart aching. To my surprise, my cheeks remained dry as the boys maneuvered the streets of Mythira's Valley. Something in me had been prepared for the reaction of my family. I was ready to train, to see the reports of Terrance's whereabouts, and to get him back home safe, then live out the rest of my life in the castle, working.

Despite it being a path I hadn't expected, the overall outcome had similarities. A comfortable life of work. This time in a castle doing the Queen's work instead of in the home I grew up in working on my family's farm.

The taste of adventure drew me to this path, and I knew that I would continue to walk it. The news of who I was was branded into my soul, imprinted in my thoughts. It was something I couldn't ignore -- I don't think I'd go back to the farm if I could.

If Terrance is dead... Will I still take the freedom offered to me?

Against my will, my eyes trailed to the man in front of me on the horse. Travis was clearly an exemplary warrior, just like every other person I'd met so far in the castle. Those with long back stories, extraordinary experiences, impressive abilities and lives filled with action. Now that I'd been thrown in, I realized that maybe I did like it.

That girl called me a Cursedblood, but at the moment, I didn't feel that cursed.

Gray War, her voice echoed in my head. I scowled, spotting something flash in my vision. Shade did as well, yanking his own horse to a stop. Andrew, Travis and Elijah continued on for a second before slowing down to look back at Shade, his eyes focused on something in the shadowy alleys of the Valley.

"Shade?" I prodded, nerves causing me to tense as he held up a finger, meaning for me to "shush."

We waited, gradually picking up the attention of passersby, who stopped at stared at us with worried expressions. The Prince shifted uncomfortably in his saddle as he watched Shade dismount slowly, no one making a noise.

Until a little Lightblood girl ran in front of Shade, close to the bushes, squealing in delight. A woman screamed as a pale arm with a purple hue reached out and latched its fingers around the girl's pigtail, yanking her into the bushes. Shade instantly drew his sword and leapt into the bushes, followed by Travis and Andrew. Elijah hesitated to dismount, his eyes faraway as his power probably honed in on whatever they were attacking. I hesitated as well, watching as the three boys were launched back onto the road, straight on their asses, followed by a pale humanoid landing on Andrew. It was a vampire, easily spotted by the red eyes and glinting fangs. A Darkblood who's demonic tainted blood turned it into a bloodthirsty creature. People screamed, running for cover -- meaning I was the only one who noticed the little girl was gone. The realization chased my fear away and I slid down the horse's flank. I was unarmed, driven by adrenaline, and running for the bushes like my life depended on it. Momentarily, I forgot about the boys struggling with the vampire and crashed through the shrubbery, searching for pigtails.

There, on the other side of the bushes, was the little girl, her caramel skin looking green, one pigtail gone and laying next to her, the hair cut. Her neck was bloody, with the red liquid gushing from two puncture wounds. I gasped, swooping down to lift her into my arms. There was a chance she was already poisoned with Darkblood, meaning she could be on her way to Death's door at this very moment.

But there was also the possiblility that the vampire had tried to turn her through an enchantment that affected the blood they shared, and that she was about to spring at me with fangs.

To outright kill or to be merciful? I wondered, hearing a grunt from behind me. My focus went to the struggle on the road and I ran out, the body in my arms limp. Gently laying her down where I could keep her in my sight, I watched as Andrew went head to head with the vampire, his one fist alive with flames. Unlike a warlock, he couldn't throw it very far, but he seemed to be doing well as he slashed with his sword and followed it up with strong hits from his flaming knuckles.

I cringed as the vampire took a blow to the face, fire burning his skin. The thing stumbled, eyes nearly glowing red as he glanced from Andrew to Travis, who was trying to clear the area of citizens. Elijah was helping, and I noticed the mark of the royal family on his clothes the second the vampire did. It lunged, heading for the Prince instead of its opponent, and my feet acted out of instinct. My veins felt charged with power as I practically pounced, tackling the vampire with surprising force a foot away from the Prince. He and Travis jumped, startled as they finally herded the rest of the innocents away, Elijah taking a sword from his saddlepack before grouping with the three warriors. The vampire, recovering from the shock of my tackle, launched me off his back. I flipped midair with the agility of someone I wasn't, landing on my feet with alien grace. We faced each other, the boys unsure of what to do as I snarled, not yet transformed.

"Who are you?" The vampire rasped, voice clear despite most vampires having lisps due to the fangs.

"None of your concern," I snapped, eyes flicking to the warriors standing uncertainly on the sidelines. Elijah was looking at Travis, as if he was the leader here, unsure of what to do.

What the hell? I wondered, letting my guard down. The vampire lunged, knocking me off my feet. We fell together, landing with him on top of me in the center of the street, my head nearly cracking against the cobblestone. He darted for my neck, but I managed to tense and shoulder him in the face instead. The weak attack managed to distract him and I rolled into his arm, knocking him off. We both jumped to our feet, watching each other with complete focus.

"You fight well, and your blood smells unlike them," the vampire mused, lifting a brow. "What are you, girlie? Certainly not a pure Lightblood."

He feinted to my right, spinning at the last moment to scratch his razor sharp nails across my side. I hissed, foot lashing out to catch his ankle. The vampire laughed as he tripped, eyes trained on the blood that leaked out of the wounds. "Maybe you're one of us? But again, you don't smell right. Almost like you're a bit of both."

I growled, feeling my body drop in temperature. Panting, I forced it to rise back up and keep me Lightblood. I didn't need rumours of a demon circling around Mythira.

You won't win this, love, the vampire's voice sneered in my mind. I almost outright roared, flying forward with my fist raised.

Not in that form, the voice added as the vampire caught my fist in his hand, the other arm wrapping around my body like a steel cage that pinned my other arm to my side. I struggled, and finally the boys began to realize I wasn't winning since I was refusing to shift. They gasped, running forward with their swords raised, before the vampire spun me around, effectively pinning both arms down and trapping me against his chest.

"Now, now," the vampire said in a teasing voice, "we best not be too hasty. We don't want to test the halfblood's abilities today, do we?"

Halfblood. Even though there was no one in sight, I knew the word would spread. People who knew me would confirm the rumours, and soon Mythira would know that I existed.

I, Storm-Cloud Katlyn Rose, was a halfblood. Gray One. Cursedblood.

And now my kingdom would be finding out.

Cursed Blood - 20.Cat Free of the Bag.20[1,031 words]

"Shut up," I snarled, fighting against the vampire's iron grip. Panic set in now that I was unable to do anything without making things worse for myself. Just when things seemed to be working themselves out, the secret had to be spilled. Cat out of the bag. The only thing that could make it worse was if people know that my Darkblood allowed me to be a full-on *demon,* or tainted angel as people had referred to it, which was the poetic way of thinking of it. The Lightblood who's a Darkblood. An angel with demonic taint.

My own thoughts nearly made me roll my eyes as the boys I'd come here with stopped, uncertain as to how to improve the situation.

"Good," the vampire praised, voice so close to my ear I shuddered. "Now let's make a deal. You let me take girlie, then I'll tell you how to save the little one."

My eyes flicked to the little girl at the side of the road. She was so still, frozen and green in the face. Elijah looked as well, his expression torn as he looked from me to the little girl.

A troublesome halfblood or a young Lightblood full of potential.

"Just protect her," I whimpered, meaning the girl. I had already stopped struggling. I couldn't force them to choose between me and a little girl. "I'll figure this out."

But will you, halfblood?

I cringed as the vampire began backing away toward the bushes, taking me away from the four boys. They watched, still having not made a decision, until I felt the vampire freeze behind me.

"H-How," he choked, his hold on me releasing. I spun around only to have two arms wrap around me, squishing me into someone's chest.

"Thank god," Shade muttered as he embraced me, "I was worried he'd sense my presence."

The initial shock of being hugged by him caused me to lose my words, and I sputtered as he squeezed me tight before letting go. A shy smile was on his face, revealing a dimple in his cheek. It made my face heat up, which was something I rarely did. I could never imagine myself, raised by a father and three brothers, blushing at a boy.

It seemed even more ludicrous since I was supposed to be a big, bad Darkblood, but here I was, shyly smiling back. "Do you have some sort of teleportation ability?" I asked, wondering how he got past.

Shade grinned, mischief in his eyes. "Some minor invisibility and teleportation, yes. My name suits me well," he pointed out, hand slipping into mind as he began walking to the body of the young girl. The others snapped out of their trance and trailed behind us as we approached the body and I fell to my knees. Her eyes were still zipped shut, her hands cold.

No, I thought, pulling her into my lap. *Please don't die.*

Travis slowly came to stand beside Shade, his footsteps almost deafening in the silence that hung over us. He knelt as well, gently lowering himself down to be on my level as I brushed my fingers through the ends of the girl's leftover pigtail.

"Cloud," he said gently, "we should go."

I can't. This is my fault.

"We can't just leave her here," I told him, the girl's skin cold to the touch.

"We can't do anything for her," Travis added, gently closing the girl's wide eyes with a quick, respectful brush of his hand. "People are going to start talking, and we need to make sure the Valley is safe. We need to head back."

They're wrong. Maybe they *can't do anything, but I'm not them.*

Ignoring his words of reason and reassurance, I lifted the girl's head into my lap, brushing her newly cut hair out of her face. My mind was hectic, trying to think of how I could save her. My blood was also toxic, which meant it had to be magic that rescued her.

Darkblood caused this.

So maybe Lightblood could reverse it. The gift that allowed me to handle Darkblood in my veins could be the same gift that took it out of the child's system. The tingling started in my scalp, slowly travelling down to my fingers until they began to visibly temble. I pressed my fingertips to the bitemark on her neck, careful not to push hard. It was warmth gathering under my skin, sweat dripping down my forehead, gradually heating the area around me. There were voices, those of the boys, but they were too faint for me to understand. It was only warmth, and the cold that was draining out of the girl, replaced by heat radiating off me. The tingles were my Lightblood magic, alive and pulsing, waiting to destroy a disease. My thoughts sent it to her, in the form of a calm white glow beginning in my fingertips and traveling through her bloodstream. Wonder filled me as I watched the welcoming light fill her, glowing from inside her veins, the green parlour of her skin fading.

Before death could take her, the glow returned to me and the girl's eyes opened, eyelashes fluttering as her eyes tried to focus. They were wide, taking in the blue sky above her in a wonder that matched mine. Her eyes were just as blue as the sky with little clouds, remaining open as she stared in silence, my hearing slowly coming back. Instead of being yelled at to leave, the warriors who'd followed me here were whispering, eyes never leaving me as I knelt by the little girl's side.

Tears slowly spilled over, falling down the sides of her face until disappering into the hair at her temples. She sniffled, clearly sensing something had happened to her, before sitting up, launching herself into my arms.

"I've never felt something so warm and safe," she cried into my shoulder, tiny arms snaked around my neck. I held her, rocking back and forth gently as she cried. Unlike most people, she didn't cry ugly. Instead, her lips trembled but she didn't frown, and her face was less scrunched up than most's when she squeezed her eyes shut. It was a delicate cry, and all I wanted was for her to stop and to have her mother hold her.