

Cursed Blood - 21.Nora.21[1,601 words]

I didn't know how many minutes passed before Shade gently taped my shoulder, extending his hands. The little girl, who'd passed out in a deep sleep after running out of tears, didn't stir as I handed her to Shade and stood, brushing myself off. Once I was a little less dusty, he handed me the girl once again, who I balanced on my hip. Without a word, I followed him to where the three horses, Prince and other two warriors were waiting, my eyes glancing toward Andrew's fist. The fire was long gone, leaving no trace of ash behind. The Prince's eyes were fixated on the girl resting on my hip, her head limp and sliding around my shoulder.

"The Darkblood is gone without a trace. You, however, feel a bit stronger," Elijah blurted, eyes unsure as he took in my expression. I shrugged, gently moving the girl to my other hip. He frowned, crossing his arms. "Are you not worried for yourself?"

I growled, trying to express my frustration without waking up the girl. "Whatever the sacrifice, I would save her a thousand times over."

"You aren't some hero," Shade spat, "you could've easily killed her or reversed the process."

Something glinted in his eyes as I whirled to face him, as he'd been watching me from behind. I glared, another growl bubbling in my throat. Something was pushing me to be on edge -- I was worried for myself, for the burden my blood brought with it, and what their reaction would be if this escalated. On-edge Cloud was not a smart one; my mouth did what it pleased.

"Yet you would've done nothing!" I shouted impulsively. "'We should go'," I repeated, mocking Travis as I shrieked. "'Cloud, we should go. We can't do anything for her'. Well you were *wrong!* I could do something! So I did!"

"Cloud," Andrew hissed, "it's alright. Just calm down."

His words brought me off the edge of rage, my mind clearing. Beneath my skin, my body was charged with cold, electric tingles spreading through me. My gums had gone numb, and I knew that soon I'd become a demon in the middle of the Valley.

Hide what you can, I advised myself, exhaling. My grip on the girl tightened as I used her warmth to comfort my own thoughts until I thawed, waiting until I was calm to open my eyes.

Ignoring the warriors, I turned to the Prince, glaring.

"I don't care what you do to me for ignoring orders. But at least wait until we get this girl back home," I demanded, picking up on his thoughts through his expression almost as if he was projecting them like my brother could.

He nodded, turning to his horse. The expression on his face held nothing anymore; he mounted without a word, Travis dragging me to his horse despite me holding a young girl. I clung to her as he heaved me up onto the horse, ignoring my protests as he shot off without any worry for the girl in my arms. Shade and Andrew flanked the Prince who followed us closely, shouting directions to Travis. My home became a memory in the back of my mind as we road off, my focus on the innocent Lightblood I held instead of the family I left.

That life, the Lightblood family of people with the surname Rose, was no longer what I belonged to. What I belonged to held politics, jewels, fancy clothing, weapons, bloodshed and emotions that could be anywhere from rage to joy to grief. It was what I was a part of now, the choice made by the power I carried. Part of me felt nothing, when I looked back at the choice I made, all I saw was a meaningless void -- and the lack of emotion scared me. But the other part of who I was missed my brothers, and my father, and resented my mother for being flaky. The sheer power of that longing kept me on my feet.

I would find Terrance. I would redeem myself. And maybe one day, my mother would accept me again.

I was pulled from my vows and oaths as Travis slowed us to a stop, jumping down from the steed gracefully. It was bit harder for me, but I managed to slide to the ground without hurting the girl in my arms. We were outside a bakery, one I'd visited a lot as a child. Warmth poured from inside, the store maintaining a homey feel with its creme and pastel pink walls. I led the way, stepping inside with confidence as I craddled the girl in my arms, holding her bridal style. Inside, there were few customers, and two people behind the counter. Both looked up, one male and one female, the woman's eyes widening as she looked at the limp figure in my arms.

"Wendy," she breathed in shock, running around the counter. She rushed toward me with tears in her eyes, taking the girl -- Wendy -- from me. "Oh my baby girl," she whimpered, hugging the child like it she was her lifeline.

"What happened?" The woman snapped, eyes hard and angry as she stared at me. I gaped, feeling Travis step in behind me as the woman snapped at me.

He cleared his throat obnoxiously loud, crossing his arms as he planted himself beside me. "Your daughter was recklessly playing outside and was attacked by a Darkblood. We, along with three others, *saved* her."

The woman gasped in horror, falling to one knee while keeping her limp daughter steady. "Please forgive me, Sir. I never meant to disrespect the Lady."

I blushed, saying nothing, unsure if I should be correcting her or not. Travis said nothing as the woman straightened, sweeping her daughter back up, and disappeared through a door blocked by the counter. Her partner, the man, switched places with her, inviting us to take seats inside the bakery. The Prince, Shade and Andrew soon arrived as well, sitting down with us while we waited for the mother to return, the Prince receiving extra special treatment.

Though I did notice the way people glanced at Elijah. It was either wonder or caution, no inbetween. The looks he got almost rivaled the ones I was shot -- by now, rumours of a halfblood would be mingling with the rumours that had already spread about me. Those at the castle knew what I was -- except for the demon form part, of course -- and that knowledge had slowly gotten to the Valley, despite the Queen's best efforts to keep it hush-hush. Now that the vampire's words were spreading, questions and accusations would be popping up tenfold.

Not like I can do anything about it, I told myself as the mother reappeared, her daughter somewhere in a closed off room. She brushed her sweaty palms on her apron before approaching our table, eyes lowered.

"My Prince," she began, facing Elijah and disregarding the rest of us, "thank you for taking the time to save my daughter. I, Nora Uzua, am indebted to you."

Elijah sighed, gently taking Nora's hand. "Ms. Uzua, please don't worry. Your daughter was worth it," he reassured her, though his eyes flicked to mine. *Worth it*, my mind echoed, remembering my own words.

I straightened. Every battle won against a Darkblood was worth it.

But what if the Lightbloods are the worse half? I asked myself, still trying to determine which side I allied myself to, deep down. In reality, I was stuck with the Queen, but I couldn't figure out if that was what I wanted.

Sighing, I pushed the thought away, eyes focusing on Nora. "Ms. Uzua," I began, "do you know the Rose family?"

Instantly, the boys were on edge, wondering what I was trying to get at. The baker frowned, and her partner nodded when she did. "We know the children, really. All four of them used to come here a lot," the man explained, reaching to shake my hand. "I am Taylor, Nora's coworker. I know less of the kids because I didn't work on site as much years ago."

I nodded, remembering Nora more than I remembered Taylor. "Sir, do you--"

Taylor cleared his throat awkwardly. "Pardon me, Miss, but I prefer neutral terms."

I paused, unable to process what they meant, before blushing and covering my face. "I am so sorry, Taylor. Please forgive my ignorance."

They smiled, waving me off. "It's uncommon in our kingdom, I understand."

Recovering from my moment of embarrassment, I turned from them to Nora, who knew my brothers and I more. I was surprised that she didn't recognize me, but it also made my job easier.

"Did you hear of the incident? Of the son being taken?"

Taylor, their eyes sad, nodded. "We both did. Terrance was a good Lightblood," they murmured, taking Nora's hand. Her own eyes were grief stricken, staring at the hardwood floor.

"Terrance was taken by Darkbloods. The guards have been reporting back to the Queen with everything they find, but it isn't much. However..."

"However?" I prodded, hope bubbling up in my chest.

"There's a spot on the other side of the thinnest chunk of woods. That's where the rumours are. There, Darkbloods meet up to make plans and execute them then and there. No one knows for sure, but clues to where Terrance is may be there," Nora finished, looking haggard. My own heart hurt, surprised that anyone outside the family cared that much about my brother.

"Thank you," I whispered, getting to my feet. Hope caused tears to roll down the cheeks, and the boys rushed to follow me out.

"Hey," Nora called as we went through the door. I paused, glancing over my shoulder.

She smiled kindly.

"Good luck, Storm-Cloud."

Cursed Blood - 22.A Trace of Terrance.22[963 words]

I didn't hesitate to drag the boys to their horses, my hand wrapped tightly around Travis' wrist. He snickered at me as I pulled him to the mount, forcing him on it before swinging myself up.

"Let's go!" I urged. "We have a lead to Terrance!"

Travis sighed, hand going to my shoulder to stop my excited trembling. "Cloud, we can't go. We need to go back to the castle."

My smile dropped, my shoulders slumping. "Why?" I wondered, watching the other boys slowly mount up, shuffling so that we formed a tight group.

Andrew's eyes flicked from where I pouted to the Prince. Shade followed suit, and eventually Travis looked up at the Crown Prince, waiting for him to address my words.

"Elijah?"

He huffed, glaring at his warriors. "Cloud, you need to be safe. We need to investigate the Darkbloods and you more before we put all our power into finding your brother."

I paused, scowling. His words sounded recited, like he'd said them before. Like he and someone else had made the decision long ago, prior to this day or even yesterday.

Why have I been hanging around the castle while the Queen tells me about her guards' reports?

Why did I never ask to see these guards? Or go with them?

My mouth hung open in shock as my eyes softened, tears brimming in the corners.

"Elijah," I spat, "why am I training now? We were supposed to make Terrance the priority."

Silence.

Almost as loud as the thundering of my heart, felt even in my fingertips. I was upset, mad at myself and at the deal that wasn't helping me one bit. *What is wrong with me?* My mind demanded. *Why didn't I just go after him?*

He could be dead, I realized. It had been days since the attack, and somehow I thought that the Darkbloods keeping Terrance would just *wait* for me to start searching? What naivety had taken over me? The thought sent me over the edge, and I practically leapt from the horse, my blood already dropping in temperature. Voices called my name in one giant shout, causing my ears to ring as I ran from them. The hooves pounded the streets, their horses easily keeping up until I threw myself into the thickest crowds, seeking out a path through the alleyways.

I want Kai, I thought, I need Kai!

With the only way to reach him being my telepathy, I had to get to a safe enough place to create the equivalent of a thought-bomb to reach him. I ran, my lungs working overtime as my footsteps echoed through the alley, easily trackable. As I sprinted through the

alleys, searching for somewhere to hide, I began to notice pipes on each building, most likely for water or some other system. On the next building, I predicted the appearance of a pipe, and pounced for it. The thick metal was able to hold to the building as my shoulders were jarred, my body jerking before stopping entirely. I began to shimmy up, extra agility pouring from some power source within me. I cleared the edge of the roof, sprawling out on the flat surface as the boys began shouting below, unaware that I had made it above them.

Now I need to create a thought-bomb that will alert everyone to my presence. Even Elijah.

I can only do this once.

Exhaling, I clenched my fists as I focused on the cold in my soul. On the telepathy that had become second nature, especially with the kind-hearted, one-winged beast. Pressure built up in my head, causing me to wince in pain, but I continued to call on my power, reining it in with my shabby amount of control before it became too much.

A stab of pain traveling through my temple caused me to release the thought. Kai's name was a scream in my mind as pain caused me to tuck my knees up to my chest and hide my head in them. I counted the seconds going by, waiting for the pain to fade, anticipating a response.

Please.

Please, hear me.

Then, there was flicker of worry. I lifted my head, expecting for the boys to have surrounded me, but there was no one in sight. Only the feeling of someone being in my mind.

Kai?

Another flicker of emotion. Recognition.

...Where...

The thought in response was hazy, and I was only able to catch a part of it as Kai's voice croaked in my head. I sent back another powerful thought, showing him my location. My hands shook as the communication went silent, and I began to worry if it had been Elijah receiving my thoughts and not Kai. I ducked behind a chimney on top of the building, watching the pipe I'd used to climb upward.

I'll fight them if I have to. I will find Terrance.

But thankfully, it wasn't them who appeared.

No.

It was a one-winged beast leaping over the rooftops to come to my rescue.

~o•o~

Hi everyone, it's the author (Jaymee)!

I just wanted to say that I'm hoping everyone is liking the book so far, and to thank anyone who is supporting Cursed Blood, I want to give you a chance to have your own character in the book.

I am thinking of taking two readers' characters and giving them a big role in Cloud's journey. Others may also be chosen for smaller features.

There are two ways that you can give me these characters you've designed. One can be in the commenta section of this chapter, and the other can be through twitter. I have an account that I mostly use to interact or support people that I am a fan of, but I will be using that account to talk about my own writing here on FindNovel.net. You can find me at jaymee_rogers .

Thank you for reading, and I'll see you in the next chapter :)

Cursed Blood - 23.A Problem with Masters and Flying.23[951 words]

Kai, in all his glory, landed on my rooftop gracefully, claws digging into the surface as he skidded to a stop. Waves of happiness from both of us flooded the telepathic connection we had, and it was almost enough to distract me from the shouting below. Travis, Shade, Andrew and Elijah had spotted the dragon as he moved, and were aware that he had come for me since Elijah had recieved the thought-bomb as well. I scrambled onto Kai's back, urgently speaking in his mind.

I'll explain everything once we get into the forest, but we need to get away from the Prince.

Kai hesitated, muscles tensing and freezing in their spots. *I can't do that, Cloud. He's my master.*

I cursed in my head, trying to keep it to myself, and slid down his leg. My hands shook as I turned to him, lost as to what I was doing.

If you can't get me out of this, what do I do? I asked him, wringing my hands together. The second I went back to the castle, I'd be punished for disobeying, but I had to return at some point. It was just the matter of whether or not I'd find my brother or not first. Kai's

eyes, those that looked cold at first glance, searched my face, finding desperation and sadness in my own eyes. He sighed, smoke curling from his nostrils, and peeked over into the alley where the boys were bickering nearby on their horses.

You don't have much time, Storm-Cloud, Kai pointed out, his thoughts filled with the gravity of the situation, *and I know you don't trust yourself to do the right thing. I can feel it every time you switch from Light to Dark -- you don't know which side is the true, honorable one.* He bent, brushing his forehead against mine without hitting me with his horns. *But trust me, you cannot do any wrong, my dear. You have been given the gift to choose any path and find what is right, and you are not the person to hurt others.*

He snorted, blowing sparks in my face.

I trust you and your gut, Storm-Cloud.

What is it that you wish to do?

I clenched my teeth together until my jaw hurt, fighting panic and tears. Exhaling slowly to calm my thumping heart, I reached up to scratch between Kai's scales as I rested my forehead on his snout.

I have wings, too, I said, ignoring the nerves that were causing me to twitch. *And if I can control them, I can escape without forcing you to cause yourself pain.*

Flying when you've never flown is dangerous, Storm-Cloud! You'll fall and die, the dragon warned, stepping in my path with his legs that were thicker than I was. The twitching stopped as I glanced up at him, the sun blinding me momentarily before I focused on his scaly, kind face.

"I have to try," I croaked, throwing myself into his leg. My arms wrapped around it, hugging it so tightly I nearly pulled him over.

Master or not... if you fall, I will run to catch you, dear Storm-Cloud.

I smiled, my confidence rising as Kai stepped back, allowing me to stride to the edge of the roof. The feeling of blood in my veins, normally the same temperature as the rest of me, began to drop as I took careful steps toward the edge, my heart pounding. Kai remained vigil as he watched me go, and sent me waves of reassurance as wings began to tear through my shirt, fangs pierced my lip, horns added weight to my head, and a tail curled around my leg. Black feathers of my own angel's wings brushed against my arms as I stood on the edge, staring down at the ground. From up here, it was enough to make my knees knock together in fear.

Do it for Terrance, I told myself, pulling my eyes away from the drop. Instead, I looked toward the luscious forest and blinding sun.

I could do it. These wings were made to fly.

Taking a deep breath, I glanced over my shoulder to smile at Kai.

Be safe. I may be gone a while if I don't find him right away.

The dragon tossed his head from side to side, showing it made no difference to him.

I'll be waiting for your thoughts, Storm-Cloud. Now fly.

Nodding, I squared my shoulders, reaching out with my mind to the new parts of my body. The tail kept itself curled securely around my leg, and I maneuvered my jaw so that the fangs rested comfortably on my bottom lip. Then, I flapped my wings, earning myself a weak movement in them.

Want to play difficult?

Fine. I'll make you work.

Gulping, I stepped off the roof, feeling myself plummet down the side of the building. As I fell, my entire being was focused on spurring my wings into movement that should be almost natural. They froze midair before one extended, causing me to fall on a tilt. The feathers of the right one, the one still close to me, brushed the ground before it also fell into my control, the two of them stretching out and slowing me to a halt before they began to flap, continuing to pound until I was rising above the streets and shops. Kai, as well as the boys, called to me as I ascended into the sky, Kai's thoughts positive while the boys were outraged. As a Darkblood, my senses were also improved, and I could hear the people below whispering as a girl with black wings, horns and a tail rose into the air.

I laughed as the breeze swept by, carrying me with it as I soared.

Let them gossip.

For once, I don't mind being a halfling.

Cursed Blood - 24.Flying Solo.24[1,396 words]

It took me a while to figure out everything but flying upward. I climbed and fell through the air multiple times, falling far enough for Kai to shout in my head out of fear, but I always caught myself -- at least my wings did. Eventually, I managed to figure out how to fly in every direction, while it was choppy and awkward, but the entire thing had begun to draw a crowd. The Prince was unable to disperse them without proving rumours true, and

could only watch as guards and citizens began gathering in the streets. I jerked to the left as I lost my concentration, focused on watching the tiny people gather down below.

Storm-Cloud! Kai scolded in my brain, *you mustn't lose focus! You're fighting against your own natural control.*

What does that even mean?! I hissed, curling my fists until I steadied myself.

Let the Darkblood take control. You never had problems with being Lightblood because you allowed yourself to fully enter the Lightblood realm of being. Now you need to cross over to Darkblood. Have you flown before?

Not like this, I admitted, *but I have. Dmitri was training me, and at one point, I had no choice but to go upward to dodge his attack. The wings did it for me.*

A wave of satisfaction came from Kai. *If you let yourself trust those abilities, they will protect you. The skill is written in your blood, Storm-Cloud. You can do this.*

I counted my breath, calming my heart as I steadied out its rhythm. If Kai, a dragon, believed I could fly, then I would too.

Alright. Fine. Darkblood, here I come.

Hoping Kai would save me if I fell too far, I tilted my head back until I felt a warm ray of sun, giving me peace, before I felt myself go limp. I relaxed, giving up my stiff control over my own person, and began to fall back toward the ground, my wings flattening at my sides. Where fear should've been, I felt a strange sense of right. Something had begun to change in me, and I felt the cold pressure that was Darkblood in my veins fade, but the form remained. I was back at my regular blood state, and when I reached for my Lightblood, I found that it was already alive and working. They were going hand in hand, acting as one.

Gray One. Cursedblood. Not Lightblood or Darkblood. Both, all at once.

The realization struck deep within my soul, awakening a harmony between my power. Without having to force them to, my wings responded to my will, flaring out to catch me mid fall. I twisted, turning back upright as the crowd below gasped.

Whatever you did, Kai thought to me, *was the right thing.*

His thoughts made me grin as I shot into the air, flying like it had been natural all my life. I soared, gliding with ease as I headed for the forest. Elijah's voice berated the edges of my subconscious, easily blocked out as I focused on the wind zipping by my ears.

And as I flew alone, I felt no fear.

This is just the beginning.

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It was a while before my feet finally touched the ground again, legs crumpling as blood rushed to them. I was a ways from the edge of the forest, collapsed in between trees as the adrenaline faded. Kai and Elijah were far from my mind, and I was solely focused on getting through the trees to find my brother. Waiting for my head to stop spinning, I pushed myself up, unsure of how to get rid of my physical Darkblood attributes now that the two sides were a mixture.

They might keep me safe if I'm going into Darkblood territory, I decided, leaving my wings by my side. The horns kept twigs from hitting my face, and my tail swept the ground around me as I began walking. It was quiet beside the chirping of birds and animals going about their day, unbothered by my presence. Leaves brushed by my feet, tickling my ankles as I moved through thick trees. A deer poked its head from the trees, doe eyes watching me innocently as I froze, afraid of scaring it off. As if the animal didn't even see me as a human, it waltzed toward me, nuzzling my hand before continuing past. It left me gaping, staring even when the animal was long gone.

Animals didn't hate us Darkbloods, but they ran from Lightbloods.

What does that say about the two halves of one species?

I shuddered, generating a scrap of confidence as I strode through the trees. Minutes passed before I was suddenly spat out into a clear area. Far away, on the other side of the clearing, the forest continued on, but here, a firepit and sitting logs were abandoned. My senses pricked as I walked toward it, hearing sharpening as I focused on the woods around me. Pain began in my bottom lip where my fangs had sharpened, drawing blood as I faked inspecting the pit. A breeze blew by my face and I sniffed, picking up an unfamiliar scent. Not Lightblood, not animal or food. Another person, someone watching me in all my winged glory.

They moved, inching toward the break in the trees, and I whirled around.

"Come out."

Whoever was there, froze, probably spotting the blood dripping down from my mouth. I was a horned, winged demon, and as far as I knew, no Darkblood or Lightblood had ever looked as I did.

Finally, a single woman stepped out of the trees. Black markings traveled up her arms, the brand of a clan or family. Her eyes were golden, her hair a matching, vibrant colour as she stood watching me.

"Who are you?" The woman asked, her voice deeper than most's. She crossed her arms, moving with a liquid grace unfamiliar to me. "I'm not here to play around."

"I'm here to find someone," I answered, carefully pronouncing my words to avoid a fang lisp. "Can you help me?"

Glaring, the woman reached into a holster on her hip, drawing three small blades. "Listen, lady. This isn't Lightblood territory where you can waltz in and they'll find your kitty cat. No, this is the place they don't watch. Darkbloods live in this forest."

My heart pounded in my chest as my lead continued to grow. "Darkbloods don't scare me."

Her lips twisted into a cruel smile and she lifted a brow. "Oh? Well, why don't we test that out..."

I watched as the woman laughed, shrinking in size as she began to transform. The golden eyes made sense as my mind screamed her Darkblood type at me; werewolf. Those who's demonic taint allowed them to become powerful, deadly wolves. It took her no less than ten seconds to become a full grown wolf, standing well above a normal wolf's height. She leapt at me, claws and teeth flashing in the sunlight.

Smirking, I felt my wings close around me in an unbreakable cocoon. The second the werewolf's claws sunk into them, they flared out, jerking her shoulders apart before she was thrown to one side, the holes in my wings closing rapidly. I hissed, tail flicking back and forth, watching the wolf shake herself as she stood back up, limping as pain radiated from her shoulders.

A strange sense nagged at the back of my brain, but I was too focused on fighting to note my confusion. The wolf straightened up, growling as she charged at me. I snorted, spinning around as she grew near. While my wings kept me safe, spikes as sharp as the horns on my head popped out of my reptilian tail, striking the wolf across the face as it swung with me. Blood poured down her face, one spike narrowly missing her eye. The woman changed back instantly, her human clothes somehow remaining intact.

Perhaps it's a special material, I thought, listening to her cry out in pain as she stood up as a human. Even from here, I could see swelling in her hips and around her shoulders, with puncture wounds traveling from one of her temples down to her collar. Blood matted her hair, and I was briefly horrified by what I did in a mere few minutes.

I was not raised to inflict pain so easily, so I nearly vomitted when I saw blood dripping down her face. The werewolf, however, grinned.

"Tell me who you're looking for."

Cursed Blood - 25. Respected For Skill.25[1,209 words]

The werewolf was quick to jump to my side, interrogating me about who I was looking for. I told her it was a captive, and she said that she believed I could win the freedom of whoever it was through a duel. To avoid rousing suspicion, I distracted the girl while waiting for my instincts to kick in so that I could hide my form. Conveniently, the wings, horns, fangs and tail all melted back into my body as the werewolf began to lead me to where she assumed the captives would be, completely unbothered by the blood on her face. My seemingly permanent heightened senses continued to pick up on the smell of blood, but unlike the person I was not too long ago, the smell didn't make my stomach turn. The predatory side of me, the darker one that was rumoured to be pure evil, had made a home alongside the supposed *better* side, and I could feel the balance of light and dark in my veins. Balance that was also changing me, making my physical person a mixture of both, messing with my head.

I sighed, part of me missing the comforting feeling of the tail brushing up against my leg. It had been a useful weapon after all.

"Where do you come from?"

The werewolf's voice pulled me from my thoughts. Beside being covered in blood, she looked like a regular Lightblood girl. I floundered, slowly processing the question before hitting myself in the head, trying to knock the stupidity out of me.

"The Valley," I said, finally forcing the words out. The girl's eyes widened in amazement.

"You can hide," she paused, "*all that*, in the middle of the Valley?!"

Blushing, I looked down at my feet. "I don't look that different when they're hidden," I defended, shrugging my shoulders. Without the extra physical features, there wasn't much to differentiate me from regular Lightbloods. Not even the Lightblood in me stood out.

The werewolf's petite nose wrinkled. "They can't even feel the power radiating off of you? It's almost suffocating, and I'm used to Darkblood. I *am* Darkblood."

My cheeks got redder, if possible, and I looked her in the eye. In the back of my mind, there was a longing to become friends with the girl. I was never one to be surrounded by girls who could gossip and shop with me. All my life, it had been my brothers and the farm. Now, it was maids, princes, warriors and magic, but even if I loved the adventure, I knew I was missing out on something.

Friendship. Someone loyal to stick by my side.

But as someone who allied themselves to Lightbloods, I could never befriend a Darkblood. Not without lying.

"That's brave, man," the werewolf admitted. "But you have the power to back yourself up, so I should tell you now."

Confused, I stopped as she laid a hand on my arm, pulling me back. Her golden eyes looked guilty as she tucked a strand of bloody hair behind her ear.

"My name is Rebecca, and I know that I said I was helping, but the only captives we have are Lightbloods. I warned the camp that you were coming, and they're waiting to ambush you, since normal Darkbloods would never waste their time on a Lightblood."

The werewolf stepped closer, eyes wide. "Why do you want a Lightblood? If there's a reason, I'll call them off."

I bit my lip, feeling human teeth. As I sighed, there was a flash of pain before my Darkblood half made itself known, the wings brushing against the grass, my tail swishing left to right.

"My brother is Lightblood, and he's been taken. I'm here for him."

Rebecca stepped back, her hands shaking as she eyed me in fear. "Y-You're the one? The one who the o-old lady told us a-about?" She choked, fingernails turning into sharp claws. I stepped back, calming my quivering wings and relaxing my tail.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I just want to rescue my brother," I said, crossing my arms as Rebecca straightened, her fear gone.

"If you don't know, then we have a big problem. Follow me, Gray One," she added, bowing her head in a form of respect before popping into wolf form. I watched closely as her clothing stretched, allowing the fur through without tearing. The wolf bowed to me, bending so that she could lay her chin on the forest floor before bounding off, jumping over logs to get through the trees. I followed, running after her. Whenever a big obstacle appeared in my way, I would do a running leap and trust my wings to carry me over. Some that were too high for even Rebecca were easily cleared by me, and I never fell or stumbled.

This is getting easier. Magic and all that, I thought, keeping my eyes and nose pinned on Rebecca as she sprinted through the woods. She was easily spotted with her light fur, though she was faster than the vampire we'd encountered. Her evasive skills were compensating for her obvious colours.

My curiosity peeked as scents wafted past, those of other people. I considered turning back, since I had no way of knowing what was waiting for me, but the echo of Terrance's laugh in my memories drove me forward. With my impenetrable wings and seemingly

endless, unknown skill, I had a chance to survive whatever people were hidden in the camp. Yet for everyone's sake, I was hoping Rebecca called them off. As much as I wanted to save Terrance, slaughtering dozens of people would scar me as well.

Darkbloods, Cloud. Darkbloods. Not people.

Not according to the Lightblood kingdom.

I thought again about Rebecca, how normal she looked. The clash of bloods in my mind almost drove me to collapse in frustration when Rebecca skidded to a stop, claws sliding through soft dirt. My wings flared, catching air to slow me down as I leapt over a log and landed next to her intimidating wolf form. She glanced at me before a cool, melodic voice resembling hers entered my head.

Do you hear me, Gray One?

Loud and clear, I snickered mentally, swearing there was an amused smile on her wolfish face. She began walking again, gently placing one paw ahead of the other, leading me toward the camp. It was a compound of several nice-looking huts with an impressive level of cleanliness. It was also the opposite of what I expected, with people bustling around the hard-packed dirt roads instead of lying in wait.

"You called them off?" I wondered, the words like hisses as my fangs got in the way.

A chuckle rang through my ears. *Of course, Gray One. You don't know the half of what you symbolize.*

I sighed, looking back at the camp. People began to stare at us, spotting the bright werewolf beside me, who they probably knew. Recognition flashed in their eyes, easily seen by my heightened vision. A low whisper began to spread before one particularly small man, his skin the colour of caramel with black tattoos, similar to Rebecca's, swirling up his arms, and seemingly his entire body, stepped forward to greet us.

"Becca," he nodded to the wolf, "this is her?"

Her answer was firm and left no room for argument.

The man squared his shoulders before kneeling at my feet.

"It is an honor, Cursedblood."

Cursed Blood - 26.The True Cursedblood.26[1,136 words]

The man rose slowly, his joints snapping into place as he straightened up. His eyes met mine, and I found myself relaxing. He, like Rebecca, seemed normal. In the back of my mind, I was beginning to realize that the Lightbloods had it all wrong.

"She doesn't know *who* she is, Sven. Not a clue," Rebecca explained as I froze, unable to form coherent words. She stepped forward, partially shielding me from prying eyes as I trembled, truly at a loss. The feathers of my wings were quivering, sensing my distress, and if I couldn't calm myself soon, I had a feeling that whatever defense magic I had would activate itself.

It's okay, I tried to convince myself, trust Rebecca to help you. Find Terrance. Then you can leave.

My breath came out hard, whistling through my teeth as I clenched them together, fingers balling into fists. Pain radiated up my leg as my tail twisted around it, tightening until I wanted to cry out in pain.

Calm down. You don't need to panic. Stop.

My chest heaved and I forgot all about Rebecca's and Sven's conversation. Eyes began to find me again as I panted, squeezing my eyes shut as the pain washed over me.

A hand laid on my shoulder, and my eyes popped open. A little boy, with large green eyes and raven hair, stared back at me. Silence had fallen over the Darkbloods as the young boy pulled me down to his level, pushing my shoulder down. I was too dumbfounded to do anything but kneel, coming face to face with the kid.

"Hello," he said, tilting his head, "are you okay?"

With suddenly stable, even, breath, I responded. "I'm fine, thank you."

He smiled, eyes disappearing as his cheeks overtook them. "That's good. My Mum was very worried about you, Miss. She said that you were an important person, but you weren't being taken care of," he rambled, pointing to a young woman on the edge of the crowd. She looked strong, but there was a youth in her that surprised me, and I wondered when she had had her child.

"Tell your mother I said thank you," I whispered, a smiling matching the boy's lighting up my face. He giggled, running back to his shocked mother before waving at me. I waved back, allowing myself a moment of childish happiness, ignoring the staring eyes.

Then my moment was over, and Rebecca took my hand. She turned me around to face Sven, who seemed like the leader of the camp.

"We should speak, if you don't mind."

I shook my head, and we were off.

~o•o~

The camp's main hall was wooden on the outside, but intimidating once you got inside. In the meeting room, one long, granite table stretched from the doors to the other side of the room, allowing just enough space for people to walk around the chairs. It was empty, the room holding a haunting stillness to it. Portraits of past Darkblood legends, cruel beings whose deadly abilities made them the antagonists of Lightblood campfire horror stories and the protagonists of Darkblood heroic tales. Other than that, there were articles and documents posted and organized in shelves.

"Do you use this room a lot?" I wondered, wandering toward one wall. It held multiple portraits, some of which I recognized as people in older Lightblood horror stories.

Sven and Rebecca watched me from the door. "Not really. Whenever we send spies into the Valley, it's usually done on a whim. Or they go just because," the man explained, watching me with narrowing eyes. "We kill because we've been oppressed for too long when we are the stronger blood, and some of us have too much frustration to keep contained. Most Darkbloods frequent the Valley alone or in duos."

I gulped, nodding before turning back to the portrait in front of me. These people hated those I was raised by, so my guard had to be kept up. Whatever was happening might not protect me from that hatred.

"What does Gray One mean?" I asked, my heart pounding in my chest. My imagination fed me images of a ritual where I was the sacrifice or being burned at the stake, causing my stomach to churn and bile to rise in my throat. Rebecca seemed to sense my fear, and she walked forward, taking my hand.

"It is an honor to be the Gray One. That is the name for the Cursedbloods."

I slipped my hand from hers, turning my back on them. "Why Cursedblood?"

"There has been two known cases of a being like you in the past. One Lightblood had the scent of Darkblood. Another Darkblood had a defense magic that didn't allow any blood type hurt him. These two were both honored as powerful leaders in their time, for both bloods. They would've brought peace to the land if they hadn't gone mad from the pressure and if their people hadn't been plotting against them. They both should've been able to rule and bring peace, but their curse stopped them. The curse of misfortune; of never being able to succeed."

"You're a Darkblood raised Lightblood, right?" Rebecca chirped the second Sven was finished his explanation. I turned back to them, swallowing nervously.

"Is that what the lady you mentioned said?"

The werewolf smiled. "Cursedbloods are given the title of Gray One when both sides agree that they carry their blood or their allegiance. A woman unfamiliar to us told us that the true Gray One would be coming for a Lightblood while bearing an angel's wings."

I looked away, staring at the floor. Elijah and the Queen had slowed down my progress, and my mother shunned me while my brothers never stopped her. Despite it being dangerous for them, a part of me wished I'd let them come with me. Another part of me wanted to stay with the Darkbloods, since they seemed to know the answers to my questions.

Sven stepped forward, joining Rebecca in front of me. The tattoos up his arms seemed to move and ripple as he crossed them.

"Why are you the true Gray One, miss? What makes you different?"

My wings drooped in defeat. Nerves tingled up and down my arms as I looked Sven in the eye before glancing at Rebecca.

"My name is Cloud. I belong to both bloods," I said quietly, watching Sven frown.

"I have Lightblood gifts... And Darkblood gifts," I clarified, scratching the back of my neck. "I'm both and neither."

Their eyes widened, and Sven's lips twisted into a small, gentle smile.

"The true Cursedblood. Our Gray One," he murmured, tilting his head in amazement.

I cleared my throat, pushing away my pride as I spotted the awe in their expressions. Fangs pressed into the already dented skin of my lips, pain radiating from the raw spots.

"I need my brother, and I have questions I'd like to have answered."

Rebecca smiled.

"Why don't you stay for dinner?"

Cursed Blood - 27.A Brother.27[1,211 words]

It wasn't long before I was seated with several other Darkbloods around a large unlit bonfire. A couple, along with three children, were busying themselves in preparing a feast

for everyone in the camp while Rebecca and Sven went to retrieve my brother. Whispers had already traveled around camp about how he would be the only Lightblood leaving their camp alive, but I couldn't be bothered by that. I was shaking with excitement and fear, anticipating the arrival of answers, but a large part of it was the suspense of finally being able to hold my oldest brother again, and return him home safely.

"Cloud," someone called softly. Several people, most likely not named Cloud, turned in unison with me as I craned my neck, spotting Sven and Rebecca holding a slumped form between them.

Terrance.

Oh god, I thought, scrambling toward them. Terrance.

"Terrance!" I cried, falling to my knees in front of Rebecca and Sven. My wings, which had been out for a while, flared, knocking the Darkbloods away. My tail swirled until it was encircling us as I embraced my brother, tears streaming down my face.

"What did they do to you?" I sobbed quietly, holding his shaking body close to mine. He was thinner, and dirty, though he was physically fine. Someone had obviously tended to him after I arrived and tried to improve his condition.

I shivered as a deep, raspy voice that still had a hint of Terrance's tone spoke directly in my ear. "C-Clo...Cloud?" He choked, parched. His entire weight leaned into mine and I nearly toppled over until my wings flapped, pushing us up.

"Cloud?" He said again, shifting backward to look me in the eyes. Instantly, my Darkblood form melted away. I was back to his little sister, a powerless Lightblood, who looked and acted like herself. Not some multi-talented, legendary mix of both.

Not someone confused, who should've been able to save him sooner.

My eyes watered, fresh tears rolling down my cheeks. I wanted to scream and dance around the fire at the same time, but the eyes of dozens of Darkbloods kept me rooted in place. Any of them would attack my innocent brother unless I was there to stop them.

"You came for me," he said in wonder, bright eyes wide. "You saved me, Cloud. Oh my god, you saved me."

He leaned his forehead into mine, holding me there as his body shook. For the first time in my life, I saw my brother cry.

"I'm so sorry," I choked, brushing dirt off of him. "I should've come sooner. I am so sorry, Terrance. I love you so much, I should've come sooner."

His hand clamped over my mouth, forcing me to be quiet. Eyes I'd seen only on his twin looked back at me, the only part that was still purely Terrance.

What happened to you?

What did I do?

"You came, Cloud. That's enough," he corrected me. He leaned in for another hug before he froze, hands clamping around my shoulders. Something flickered past my senses and instead of letting my brother defend me, I whirled around, Darkblood form appearing out of my body as I snarled, hand wrapping around the hilt of an axe that was aimed to go over me and hit my Lightblood brother. Another werewolf stared at me in shock, glancing at my tail as it hovered in the air, covered in spikes that ruined Rebecca's face until her superhuman healing abilities kicked in. The girl was younger than I was, her entire body quivering in fear as I snarled.

"You don't touch him," I whispered, leaning close to her face. She nodded, trying to pull away from my grip. I laughed darkly, my grip tightening until my nails cut through the wooden handle.

Looking over her shoulder, I saw a mix of stunned and respectful expressions.

"None of you touch my brother! None."

They bowed their heads, and once each one of them were frozen in submission, I released the wolf. She scrambled away, sobbing as her heart pounded so loudly I could hear it. I turned back to Terrance and helped him to his feet, watching as he gently brushed his fingers along my wings.

"You... Have a lot to explain."

I chuckled.

"Then come eat, and I'll start talking."

~o•o~

It wasn't long until everyone had calmed, their respect causing them to be cautious not to hurt Terrance. Sven led celebrations, and Rebecca made it obvious that she was the clown of the camp as everyone laughed everytime she opened her mouth. My brother got to eat whatever he pleased, and children of the camp helped me clean him up, listening to my stories of the farm and Kai.

It took longer to explain who I had become to my brother. We'd taken a tour of camp, following two little girls, sisters with power over the elements, allowing us time to talk things out since the girls were both deaf. They would come to us, show us something

about the village, and then run ahead while I told my brother about what had happened since he'd been taken.

"And that's the full story," I told him as we'd been returning to the bonfire. "You're one of the handful of people who know it all."

He'd come through as a big brother as he pulled me to a stop, holding my hand as I looked back at him.

"Cloud," he began, "you're still my sister, and you always will be. In the end, you *came* for me. That's what matters."

I hugged him quickly, keeping the tears out of my eyes before we slipped into our spots. A lot of eating later, mostly on his part, we were sitting comfortably, kept warm by blankets, while Rebecca told stories to everyone. She began a new one, catching my attention as Sven sat beside me, listening intently as well.

"Cursedbloods," she began, the word ringing out. People glanced at me, silence suffocating us all as suspense built up. "We all know their story."

"So let me tell you a new one."

Hi guys! Author here.

Two things! One; I know there are some loose ends that may need to be answered through dialogue between characters. Those are coming in a few chapters, don't worry! Scenes and things will be addressed before more of the plot comes into play.

And the second thing! I would like to thank @beavan for bringing this to my attention, and for their kind words.

What did they bring to my attention? I didn't have an update schedule, but that has been sorted out and I decided I will be aiming to update one chapter at a time on Sundays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. That means back to back updates on the weekends and one mid week.

If I miss a day, I will address it on the wall of my profile.

Before I go, a quick reminder that I would love to add a touch of my readers into the story. If any of you have designs for a character that you would like to see becoming characters in Cursed Blood, leave them in the comments on a chapter or tweet them @ jaymee_rogers .

Don't worry, the end of this mini rant is coming, but first I'd like to say thank you to everyone who comments, reads, reviews and does anything else to support Cursed Blood. It means a ton :)

Cursed Blood - 28.The Legend of the Curse.28[1,002 words]

"Once upon a time, while Darkbloods and Lightbloods lived in clans before the wars began and a kingdom built on oppression was formed. Dragons worked like pack mules, Darkbloods and Lightbloods could've been enslaved to each other... It was a strange balance that both sides could agree with.

Since the two sides were not at each other's throats, there was the rare yet possible chance that a Lightblood and Darkblood could get along. That is what happened with Joseph and Gavin, the two who created Cursedbloods. These two became best friends, and to reconcile their two tribes in hopes that they could stay friends, the two began experiments."

Rebecca paused in her haunting story. The werewolf had been slowly moving around the circle, her voice traveling despite the low tone.

"They were unsuccessful until one day, Gavin met a girl. She was gifted with a self-healing ability that protected her from the effects of the other blood. At first, she became a powerful hybrid. But slowly, as they kept giving her more doses, her gift began to weaken. The doses were overpowering her.

To save her, Gavin was prepared to call it off. However, Joseph was drunk off the pleasure of having a breakthrough. He refused to stop, and kidnapped the girl from her clan.

This led to the beginning of the ageless war. Gavin's clan fought to save the girl, and Joseph's clan fought to protect their experiments.

However, both sides lost. Joseph and the Darkbloods were pushed into hiding, dominated by the Lightbloods. Gavin and his clan found their stolen member, but not alive."

Rebecca paused, swallowing before she slipped into her spot, eyes on the fire.

"That short part of a long, legendary story holds the curse of mixed-blood people. They were never the true Gray Ones, and their blood led to their demise.

"But today, we have found a true Gray One. One who may truly hold the power to undo what the creators of a fake mixed blood started. This, this is the meaning and story of the Cursedbloods."

A thought hit me, but I refused to let it through.

Silence. Suffocating, heavy in the air. My brother leaned into me, seeking comfort in my warmth. My form was hidden, tucked away. I probably didn't look like much, but deep down I knew that the story had been for me.

A lucky gift and an unpleasant situation had given me this curse.

And if it wasn't for the brother currently leaning on me, I probably would've stayed with the Darkbloods to avoid the Gray War.

That girl in the hall. The phantom.

Could she be Gavin's lost clan mate? Or maybe something more to him?

Exhaling, I watched as Sven got to his feet. He held a large mug of something that was probably alcohol, but still held on to his balance and intimidating aura.

"This curse may be still affecting us to this day. Another phase of war may be waiting for us.

"But, if our existence is for nothing, then we will at least be certain that they were something for Cloud, the true Gray One!"

People began to chant a pledge, causing my heart to pump.

They wanted to be loyal to me. This small piece of Darkblood population.

I was already, secretly, loyal to the Queen.

What do I do?

My hands shook as I gently pushed myself up off the log, making sure Terrance could balance himself as I faced the many Darkbloods staring at me. The fire danced in front of me, heat radiating off of it. It reminded me of the difference in bloods, though that had eventually disappeared for me.

"You all know that I didn't know any of this before today. I'm still unsure of what I'm supposed to do from this point forward. Tonight, I will return my brother to our home. But then, I must go to the Lightblood Queen's castle. When I was still unsure of who I was not too long ago, I made a mistake of hastily pledging myself to her," I confessed, looking away from their solemn eyes. I stared into the fire, choking on guilt.

"And I'm sorry for that," I continued, my voice breaking partway through. "But I know now that my loyalty does not lie with her. It lies with both of you. And I will do what I can to make sure that the war will stop, even if it means going back to our ways as tribes."

I sighed, my shoulders slumping forward, unsure if they would simply kill me here and now, or lock both my brother and I up. They could probably attack him before my form comes back to protect us.

A hand slipped in mine, squeezing gently. It was one of the deaf girls, her face painted with a childish smile. Her sister sat on the logs, watching us with sad eyes. My best guess was that someone had signed them the news.

Another smaller hand grabbed my free one. It was the young boy who'd got me out of my state of panic earlier. He, someone who'd heard my words firsthand, kept a firm grip on my fingers, a determined look in his eye.

"My Mum taught me that people make mistakes and do bad things, but it doesn't mean they meant to. She forgives me when I break something by accident because she knows I didn't know what I was doing. So we're going to do the same for you, Miss Cloud," he told me, never faltering in his words. We held eye contact, even as tears began to fall from mine out of relief. The two children smiled at their fellow Darkbloods before scampering to their seats, letting Sven take their place.

"Sit," he ordered, "and enjoy yourself. You and your brother will be escorted back once the feast is over."

"Thank you," I whispered as he led me to my spot next to Terrance, pulling the blanket around my shoulders like a loving father.

Sven smiled as if he could hear my thoughts, which was a possibility, and patted my head affectionately.

"It's my pleasure, Cloud."

Cursed Blood - 29. Brotherly Love.29[1,008 words]

(Swear Warning in this chapter. Not a lot, but if anyone is offended by cursing, please be cautious. It is later on in the chapter.)

Warm, happy, and full, my brother and I set out with a group of three Darkbloods to head back home. The camp had promised to send people to other pockets of Darkblood population to tell them about what happened, and they also promised to take turns hiding in the Valley so that they could reach me through telepathy. Several of them were impressed by my sheer telepathic power, though it also led to them being afraid of what my other abilities were. Overall, Terrance and I left with our escort on a good note, and I had a skip in my step as we got closer to our home. He couldn't keep a slow pace, and we found ourselves practically running through the trees, laughing. My mind was clearer, and even if there was a punishment waiting for me back at the castle, my mood couldn't be dampened. I was over the moon about rescuing my brother and being able to focus on training and spending my days with Kai.

And after that, all I had to do was bring the two bloods together to avoid an all-out war.

It won't be easy. But I'll have to figure it out, I told myself firmly, grinning as a Darkblood with webbed fingers jumped at me. I met him midair, poking the webbing in between his fingers. It was sensitive, causing him to squeal as we landed and kept running, keeping up with the others. A Darkblood who could project her dreams onto thin air threw silly images at us as Terrance grabbed my hand, pulling me with him as we pushed through the branches and bushes.

After what seemed like only seconds of playing, we were spat out on the other side of the forest. It may have very well been the farthest point of the Valley from our farm, but it didn't matter as we quickly bid goodbye to the Darkbloods before they melted away into the night.

Goodbye, Gray One.

Call me Cloud, goofballs, I responded happily, letting Terrance pull me onto the sidewalk. Gradually, I felt the natural connection slip away, but the smile on my face remained.

"H-How is everyone?" Terrance blurted, breaking me from my thoughts. I paused before answering, thinking of our mother who hated me.

"They'll be happy to see you," I answered, not quite lying but definitely keeping the whole truth from him. He grinned, watching people go by as we walked down the street. Some turned to study me, but the darkness helped conceal my features enough for them to blow off their suspicions. I could only hope that the royals would find a way to get the citizens off my back.

Streetlights illuminated the dark roads, since it was long past sunset with the moon hanging above us. Not too long ago, I would've been afraid to walk at night. Afraid of criminal Lightbloods and Darkbloods in general, but now, with my brother by my side and my power to back me up, I strolled confidently down the dark roads. Even with my Darkblood form hidden, I felt stronger. Smarter. Ready for a fight, ready to defend those I was loyal to.

Truly loyal to. Whether the Queen and her people fell under that category would be something I decided on my own time. For now, I was content to return home for a fleeting moment before I'd rush back to the castle to receive a slap on the wrist.

Or maybe imprisonment, who knows.

"Cloud," Terrance said gently as we passed the fountain, getting closer to our family's farm, "where are you going once you return home?"

I sighed, watching my shadow transform and shift along the dirt path. "The castle. I have to go back."

He sniffled, hand dropping from mine. "And you won't let us come with?" He prodded, meaning himself and our brothers. I winced, rubbing my arms as a breeze blew past.

"I can't," I said, the volume barely above a whisper as my voice cracked. "I can't do that to you."

Terrance stopped suddenly, causing me to trip as I followed suit. I turned to him, looking as the face I hadn't seen in what felt like eternity. The shadows sculpted his features in an unfamiliar way, but it was still my oldest brother all the same. Taken by clawed monsters who hated our half of the species.

"Cloud, you're so stupid," Terrance coughed, and I noticed a shiny trail leading from his eye to his chin. I was shocked, seeing my brother cry again. "You're so fucking stupid," he hissed, a tear dripping off his nose.

"We want to protect you, Cloud. We want to *help*. It doesn't matter if you're some super amazing hybrid freak," he snapped, tears streaming down his face faster. I choked on a gasp, unable to stop him as he balled his fists, voice rising. "You're not invincible, Cloud! You're still my baby sister who didn't have magic for most her life. Just because that changed doesn't mean you're suddenly on top of the world. We're supposed to protect you, Storm-Cloud!"

He sputtered, sniffing as he begrudgingly wiped away his tears, his frustration simmering down.

"You may be powerful, *maybe*, but you still need us, Cloud. We're not gonna sit back and watch you get yourself killed playing hero," he spat, stomping by me. I watched him, too stunned to move until he slowed down, glaring at me over his shoulder.

"Get your ass over here, kid. I'm still your brother."

A hint of playfulness smoothed out the anger in his tone, and I bit my lip to keep myself from smiling as I caught up to him.

You may act all worried and tough, big brother, I thought as our footsteps echoed down the mostly-empty street, *but you're just looking out for me because you love me.*

And Terrance, I thought, keeping it to myself since I didn't need to use telepathy to know he knew it.

I love you too.

Cursed Blood - 30.Mother Trouble.30[1,129 words]

It was probably past midnight when we finally got to the farm. My knuckles pounded against the door with an urgency that would rouse at least Charles. Terrance paced the porch, a living ball of nerves as footsteps came toward the door. He jumped in fright as it swung open to reveal none other than our mother.

She took one glance at me, and that was all that happened before I felt my neck twist, pain radiating through my cheek.

"Get away from here," she snarled, clearly unashamed of hitting her own daughter. The woman hadn't even noticed her son, back home safe and sound, and began to slam the door shut.

I growled, throwing myself at the thin wood. My strength outmatched hers by quite a lot, and she stumbled back from the door, causing enough commotion to awaken the men of the house. My father and two other brothers came stumbling from their rooms, rubbing their eyes and yawning.

"Cloud!" Charles exclaimed, arms wrapping around me as he squeezed the air from my chest. I tapped his shoulder, signaling I wanted to be let go, and he complied.

"Why are you here?" Charles asked, eyes wide in excitement. I opened my mouth to answer when a certain annoyance decided to butt in.

"It doesn't matter why!" My mother snapped, eyes wild with hatred. "The demon needs to leave!"

I winced, clenching my fists. Just outside the door, Terrance was hovering, hearing my mother's cruelty for the first time. I could imagine the rage on his face, the frustration from how I was treated.

Deal with it, I told myself, you need to deal with it as if it isn't a problem.

"I will leave. But first, there's someone you need to see," I countered, shifting to look out the door. Terrance got the message, a dark look on his face as he stepped out into the open. His eyes were filled with hatred, and focused on our mother.

My father and brothers gasped while my mother fell to her knees in shock, hand over her mouth. Charles and Warren held their breath, watching as Terrance came to my side. Then they leapt at him, incasing him in their arms as they squealed various things in joy. My father, instead of going straight to Terrance, wrapped his arms around me, holding me tight.

"You did it, Cloud," he whispered, on the verge of tears. "You brought him back."

I nodded, holding his shirt in my fist. "It was easy, I just had to break a few rules," I joked weakly, burying my face in the rough cloth of the garment. He placed his chin on my head,

chest heaving as he let out a shaky breath. When my brothers were done suffocating each other, they stepped back so that my father could greet his eldest son, and came to me. Warren ruffled my hair, patting my shoulder, clearly still stunned. The brother closest to me, Charles, did something much different. His wrapped around my waist and he lifted me up, spinning around before setting me back down.

"You did it, Cloud! You really did it!" He cheered, holding my face in his hands as he laughed, his cheeks shiny from tears. I laughed as well, grabbing both of them in a hug.

That left our mother, who shakily stood up as the welcomes died down. She stared back at the five of us smiling and giggling, our arms still tangled around each other. She and Terrance made eye contact, causing his anger to return. The oldest Rose child stepped forward, hands balling into fists as he loomed over our mother.

"How. Could. You." He snapped, making her flinch. I nearly stepped in to stop him, but Charles held onto my wrist, shaking his head.

"She's your *daughter*! Your only one! The one you spend girls' days with and laugh with and the one who braids your hair when you can't and who helps you pick out clothes for when you have important events. What the hell is wrong with you?!"

My mother puffed her chest out, unable to back down from a fight whether she was losing or winning. "Don't talk to me like that! I'm your mother!"

Terrance growled, slamming his hand into the wall beside him. We all flinched, and I felt myself teetering in between Lightblood and Darkblood forms.

"The woman who loved all four of her rowdy children was my mother! The one who cherished her goofy twins, indulged in her son's curiosity and loved her daughter even if she had no power. The woman who raised all four of us to know what hard work was, and who taught us to be afraid of the dark because that's where we would get hurt," Terrance shouted, hitting the wall again. My father stepped forward, forcing his arm back down to his side. His shoulders slumped forward, but he held his head high.

"You," Terrance spat, "are no longer that woman, *Alice*."

My mother, Alice Rose, sputtered in anger. She turned to our father, her eyes wild with frenzied anger.

"Do you hear how your son is speaking to me, Jeremy?!" She screeched, pausing as my father sighed.

"Alice," my father began, his voice tired, "enough. You shun our daughter and call Terrance *my* son. Well, if you don't want these children anymore, then you're not in our family. *Get out.*"

Tears exploded from her eyes in an instant. Charles, Warren and Terrance watched as the woman they had begun to hate stomped over to me, shoving her finger in my face.

"You demon child!" She hissed, her nail swiping across my cheek, drawing blood. "You will pay for this! The Queen should've let those Darkbloods take you! You'll die for this. You'll die because of your *blood*--"

Charles growled, slapping his hand over her mouth. Without another word, he began to drag her out of the still-open door. The rest of us stood frozen, listening to her muffled angry screams as the youngest brother threw her out. The twins sighed, leaning into each other for support while my father came to my side, taking my hand. My eyes were fixated on the floors, trying to see past the black spots dancing in my vision. While I could heal my injuries quick enough -- the cut from her nail was already gone -- the emotional trauma continued to haunt me, and I felt myself swaying.

My father caught me easily as my knees gave out, his voice gently whispering in my ear that he had me. He and Warren lifted me up, carrying me to my old room as Charles got Terrance settled back in.

What a long day, I thought as I began to let the darkness take over, too exhausted to fight. *I can't believe he's back.*

And as I drifted off, a single word hung in my mind.

Soon.