

# Cursed Blood - 31.Boyish Breakfasts.31[ 1,225 words ]

Waking up the next morning was an interesting and confusing time, but I probably would've done it again. After taking all the time in the world to get dressed -- cleaning myself, the room, artfully braiding my hair and fixing up my face before slipping into my old leathers -- I began walking toward the kitchen, my powers remaining happily asleep and dormant. The smell of food had originally woken me up, and I could hear voices laughing and the sizzling of bacon being cooked. The downside was that as I was stepping into the kitchen, *someone* stepped out, and I slammed into their chest. Their chuckle was poorly stifled as I landed on my ass, my braid smacking my face. I glared up at whoever it was, unaware of exactly *who* it was until I had a good look at them.

Shade.

He was grinning, and bent down to lift me back up to my feet. I was stunned, my thoughts of a fun breakfast with my brothers and father flying out my mind. They were replaced by a dark dungeon, cold and dreary. I didn't even realize I started shaking until Shade gently tapped my cheek, resting his warm hand on my jaw.

"Come eat, Cloud," he told me gently, steering me into the kitchen. Everyone was squished around the dining table; my father, my brothers, the other two warriors and the Prince as well. An open spot awaited me, in between Terrance and Charles, while Shade took a seat beside Warren and Travis. My father continued to get up and check the second round of food being cooked while the boys were already digging in. I watched them for a second, expecting a cold silence, but instead it was all talking and laughter. A small smile broke through my shock as I began to dig into my own mound of food, joining in on their jokes and conversations.

All was going perfectly until Charles nudged my elbow during a lull in the conversation. His eyes were filled with caution as he swallowed his food, nervously playing with his fingers.

"Cloud," he began, "we've been thinking of moving to the castle. Us boys can work with knights and graduate faster and Dad can help with the work around the castle, and we'll all be together. And safe."

I swallowed my mouthful, trying to process the bomb he'd dropped on me. Eyes were beginning to fixate on us, the boys waiting for my reaction. Instead of gracing their sprung proposition with an answer, I continued to eat my food and blatantly ignored them while my thoughts aligned. They hesitantly took bites of their own breakfast, tension blanketing the air.

"Will you actually be safer?" I asked, trying to figure out what I could do. The Darkbloods wouldn't attack anyone important to me, but if my brothers became knights, I couldn't blame a Darkblood for hurting them out of self-defense, sibling or not. This war went beyond my personal feelings, it was about the abilities and discrimination of the two types. Darkbloods thrived on slaughtering Lightbloods, and Lightbloods took pride in killing as many Darkbloods as they could. It was a vicious cycle, and if I could protect my brothers from that I would.

"Yes," Elijah instantly answered. "They'll constantly have strong allies with them. They'll be fine, Cloud."

*A Lightblood Prince*, I thought as I made eye contact with Elijah. *Would he understand the kind of life Darkbloods lived if I explained it to him? Would he except that they're not completely monsters?*

Elijah caught me staring, tipping his chin up proudly. I nearly rolled my eyes, coming to the conclusion of no. My eyes passed to my brothers, each one of them looking determined and brave. The twins sat close together, while Charles took my hand as his eyes gave me his best puppy dog look.

"Fine," I caved, watching smiles light up their faces, "but what about the farm?"

My father shrugged as he dropped more bacon onto the greasy platter. "You sold yourself off for your entire life, so says the Prince. So we'll sell the farm and move permanently."

*Say goodbye?*

*Just like that?*

I gulped, my throat dry as the desert. I had no idea what the Prince told the rest of my family while I'd been asleep. Terrance knew exactly *what* I was, but did the others?

"Before you throw everything away, you should know who you're doing it for," I announced, pushing my chair away from the table. My legs shook as I stood, catching Terrance's eye. He looked worried, but nodded in support as I backed off a few steps, giving myself ample room.

*Two as one. The Gray One.*

I shut my eyes, waiting for the sound of gasps. They came as I felt a tug on the material of my shirt before my wings ripped clean through, the same thing happening to my tail. Pain struck my scalp as my braid was tugged by my horns, causing it to become messy. I opened my eyes slowly to see Terrance and the Prince's group looking solemn, waiting for the reactions of my father and two brothers. My wings fluttered, responding to my distress.

"Beautiful," my father breathed eventually, gently putting his pan back on the stove as he walked toward the strong wings at my sides. I could feel it as he brushed his fingers along the sensitive feathers, feeling their soft texture.

"Your mother was wrong when she called you a demon. Black or white, you're an angel," he added, carrying placing a gentle kiss on my forehead. "I will keep to my decision."

Relieved, I kissed his cheek before turning to my brothers. Warren looked sick to his stomach, while Charles was stone faced.

"Guys?" I squeaked, my wings folding close to my body and my tail wrapping around my leg in fear. Charles rose from his seat, slowly walking toward me.

He leaned forward, eyes on my mouth. When I exhaled, he grabbed my jaw and began examining the fangs in my mouth. He then poked my horns, gently trying to push them. "It's all real," he eventually concluded, looking down at me with a smirk. "You really are some demon hybrid thingy."

My brother shrugged. "I'm cool with it. Makes it all worth something," he said with a genuine grin, ruffling my braided hair some more. I swatted at him, watching as he danced away, giving Warren the chance to stare at me, his face pale. I relaxed, letting my extra features go limp. Remaining unthreatening as Warren cautiously came closer, stopping within a foot of me.

"Is this why you could get to Terrance?"

"Warren, I--" I began, trying to make light of the situation before he cut me off.

"Answer the question, Cloud," he demanded, eyes hard as he searched for a hint of emotion within mine.

He found nothing but the need to be accepted.

"This is all new and special and mystical," I sighed, "but yes, this form, this *part* of me, was why the Darkbloods gave Terrance back."

A flicker of understanding appeared within his eyes and he ran his hands through his hair.

"Then I'll learn to find it normal," he replied, smiling for a moment. "Thank you for bringing back our brother."

I nodded, ensnaring him in a hug. The other Rose family members joined, my wings wrapping around us as the wound of Terrance and I's absence began to heal.

As they should.

## Cursed Blood - 32.Consequences.32[ 1,238 words ]

It wasn't long until my father set his plan in motion. Elijah and the other three went back to the castle to bring more men over to help us move our stuff while my brothers packed. I, too, grabbed a few things from my old room and slipped them in my pockets as I followed my father around, helping him prep the farm for sale. Thankfully, he seemed to be happy enough to sell it, and even a little excited for living in the castle. His excitement rubbed off on the rest of us, and I found myself grinning from time to time as we ran around cleaning things up. My father was writing up a proposal to post on the town's newsboard when my brothers finally lugged their boxes of things out the front door, placing them down for the castle men to find. Travis arrived soon after, holding a contract in his hand. The five of us stopped what we were doing as the warrior came inside, looking around at the progress we'd made. He then went to my father, and the two had a quiet discussion in the corner as we slowly got back to work.

*What do you think they're talking about?*

I jumped as Warren's voice echoed in my mind. There hadn't been much telepathy since the night before, and Warren's strange Lightblood telepathy was a little different from what I was used to. I shot him a glare before shrugging as I began to wipe down the countertops.

*You're jumpier than usual. Normally you're okay with telepathy,* Warren pointed out, crossing his arms. He was out of view of the two whisperers, meaning they couldn't get whiff of him talking in my mind.

"You're different than Darkbloods," I whispered, looking away. Having him in my mind was like a strange cool breeze, while Darkbloods felt like a natural thing. Elijah felt like a Darkblood as well since he was copying Kai's telepathy, and Warren was the only Lightblood I knew who could speak in someone's mind. It was refreshing, and the Lightblood in me felt a little less suffocated.

*But it's okay, right?*

I waved him off, turning back to the counter. Warren wasn't helping my nerves as I strained my ears, my heightened senses not able to kick in since I was forcing my Darkblood back for the moment. The extra width, height and risk my wings and tail gave me were dangerous in our smaller house, not to mention I had been hitting things with my horns by accident.

My snooping didn't do much as Travis and my father separated, the man who raised me looking a little disappointed as Travis came to my side.

"We need to talk," he hissed in my ear, hand wrapping around my arm. A wooden spoon clattered to the floor as he dragged me out of the house, going around to the side. Even now, I could see an indent in the plants where Kai landed. There were also scratch marks on the side of the house, reminders that there were other Darkbloods out there who were coming after me with force.

I shivered, turning to face Travis as he began to pace. "Are you okay?" I prodded, crossing my arms. The warrior stopped briefly, glancing over at me before he sighed.

"Darkbloods have been getting unusually quiet lately, and if we add that with the problem that is your existence, no offense, it means the Queen has a full plate," Travis blurted, pacing faster. "She couldn't really find a punishment for you because they're busy with *things*. But Elijah found the perfect solution."

I raised an eyebrow. *Wouldn't a few days in a dungeon work?*

"There's going to be a ball. Everyone is coming. And it'll be centered around you. I think the Prince is hoping that kind of attention will smarten you up, but there's another thing."

My palms began to sweat as I imagine a room full of people staring at me in horror.

Forget never having time or a chance to have friends. I was just told I'd be the center of a *royal ball*.

The teenage girly side of me wanted to run into a corner and panic, and the mature side of me was trying to plan a way to survive this without making a fool of myself.

*If my wings aren't out I can hide easily...*

Travis waved his hand in front of my face. "Cloud? Did you hear me?"

I flinched, looking up at him. I hadn't heard a single thing as I panicked internally.

He rolled his eyes before crossing his arms. "We're inviting Darkbloods, Cloud. *You* are. Whoever was in that camp that gave you Terrance back is permitted to come as long as they stay with you.

"Remember, Her Majesty and His Royal Highness know who you are, more than even you know. They recognize the fact that the Darkbloods *handed* your brother over."

I crossed my arms this time, straightening up. "They may *know*," I snapped, "but they're not the only ones. And the Darkbloods are the ones who actually shed some light on the situation."

He sighed, rubbing his hands over his face. It seemed like there was something he wanted to say, but he pushed it away and ignored my words.

"You can go and invite them today. The ball is in four days. Once you're done, come straight to the castle."

With that, he turned away, clearly done with me. I sighed, grimacing as I turned toward the house and nearly slammed my forehead into the wall. Despite wanting to split my head in two, I gently tipped my head forward, letting out a long sigh.

"Cloud," a deep voice said gently. It was one of the twins, but at the moment I felt like talking to neither.

"I'd like to be alone," I responded softly, lifting my head from the wall. Glancing over my shoulder, I realized it was Terrance watching from a couple feet away, his eyes filled with worry.

Terrance shuffled toward me, averting his eyes. "I snooped a bit, and I know you hate that, but you need to hear me out, Cloud," he pleaded, holding his hands at his sides in a show of innocence.

"You saw how I was in that Darkblood camp. They *hate* us Lightbloods, and you can't watch them twenty-four seven. They'll try to hurt the people at the ball," he said firmly, his opinion unchangeable. "They attacked our house for *you*, Cloud. Don't you realize that? They already hurt your family without caring. One of them hurt *you*."

Memories. Thoughts from not too long ago. It all came rushing back, and I was surprised that it had easily slipped my mind.

"Did they hurt you?" I asked shakily, picturing Rebecca's kind face, the face I'd torn into with my tail.

Terrance looked at the ground, clenching his fists. "Just a lot of bruises, but they weren't merciful Cloud. You can't bring them to a ball. You can't trust them."

*You don't know anything*, one side of me wanted to scream. The side that shared their blood and anger. I exhaled, calming myself down, reeling in my form.

However, Terrance's words had shaken me. People had proven that I had to trust myself, because they also had their own agendas and goals.

A muddled tangle of someone else's words drifted back into my head. Someone in a hall. A figure I didn't recognize.

*Find whom you trust the most.*

*The Gray War has nearly begun.*

*Your brother will not be the last.*

# Cursed Blood - 33.Shaky Invitation.33[ 1,304 words ]

The second I finished my share of packing, I was on the road toward the forest. Certain people stared as I passed, a scarf pulled over my mouth and nose tucked into my leathers. However, instead of heading straight there, I made a pitstop at the base of Mythic Mountain, feeling outward with my telepathy. A flicker tickled at the edge of my mind, meaning I was almost close enough to call for Kai at a normal force. With a slow exhale, I called out to the one-winged dragon with a little more force than normal. A wave of recognition flooded my senses before a shadow passed over head, and soon Kai was breathing right down my neck.

*Nice to see you in one piece, Storm-Cloud. The Prince filled me in on what happened.*

"I'm glad you're around," I said as I climbed up onto his back, the movement feeling normal to me. Once I'd settled in, the dragon began wandering away from the path up the mountain.

*Have something on your mind for today, Storm-Cloud?* The dragon asked teasingly. I snickered, gently patting his scales.

*We have to go to the Darkblood camp. I'm going to invite one girl to the ball to be my plus one so that I can look after her. I trust her enough,* I responded, trying to put as much confidence in the words as I could. Rebecca was the only one I trusted to handle this situation the best way possible, and I knew I could easily take her down if it was needed.

I knew I would also protect her from my own people if I needed to. If we were going to be the only ones with Darkblood there, I was going to have her back whether or not she had mine. A wave of pride flooded from Kai, his approval wrapping around me like a fuzzy blanket that brightened my spirits.

*Lead the way, Storm-Cloud,* Kai ordered, shaking out his neck. His singular wing stretched before brushing the ground, a common occurrence for him.

*One day, you'll get that second wing,* I thought to myself before turning my thoughts into telepathic projection. *Let's go.*

He received a mental map of where to go, and we were off.

~o•o~

The forest was quieter than it had been. Few critters crossed our path, since this time instead of a lone Darkblood girl they were seeing, it was a large beast. Kai seemed smug as he strolled through the trees, never breaking away from the path I'd laid out for us.

From here, I could almost send a thought to the Darkbloods without blowing anyone's brains or shocking them into unconsciousness.

*Spring will become summer soon*, Kai noted, sniffing at the bright green leaves of the trees as we passed underneath. I sighed, leaning into his neck and closing my eyes peacefully. Spring had always been my favourite season, and I didn't want it to go.

Kai felt my silly distress and chuckle in my head, causing me to open my eyes in time to see him exhaling sparks. He began hitting bushes with his wing, sending berries flying. They splattered all around us, some of them exploding on his scales, adding purple to the blue. His eyes, a lighter purple than the dark berries, were filled with amusement as we got closer to the camp. A new connection spurred to life in my mind, and Kai's by the look on his face, and I grinned as he picked up speed. We went crashing through the bushes, creating a ruckus that stirred the camp. Several Darkbloods began to look our way as we burst through the treeline, the camp revealing themselves. At first they were skeptical of the dragon looming in front of them, but as eyes began to travel upward to where I sat on Kai's back, smiles spread across their faces.

*Cloud is back*, several voices echoed, the volume deafening as I slid down Kai's side onto my feet. He snorted, following close behind me as I approached the huts. Those who were at the bonfire, so most of the camp, rushed toward me, grinning. The young boy who'd supported me was the first to reach me.

"Hello Miss Cloud! My Mum is happy to see you again," he chirped, reaching for my hand. His was small and warm as his fingers wrapped around as many of mine as he could hold, which was an endearing three. The little boy pointed to his mother, almost giving me déjà vu. I waved to her before glancing back at the dragon, winking at him. Kai relaxed, nuzzling the young boy's arms until he patted the beast's scales. After a moment, I heard Kai's voice in my head as he spoke to the child.

*Hello, Oliver.*

*Oliver*, I thought, putting the name and face together. Oliver laughed before scratching Kai's scales, and I felt it was safe enough to leave them as I strolled toward the crowd. Pushing through the center were the heads of Rebecca and Sven, the two rushing to greet me.

"Cloud!" The blonde werewolf shrieked, flying at me with her arms outstretched. As she hugged me, my brother's reminder rang through my mind, and I hesitated before quickly hugging her back and stepping away. I schooled my facial features into a calm, pleasant expression, hiding my new distrust.

"It's nice to see you both," I said robotically, "but we need to talk in private."

The two nodded, Sven turning to wave away the gathered Darkbloods. They hesitantly dispersed, thoughts of being able to talk to me nagging at my mind before I shut out the

connections, focusing on the two in front of me. Kai remained in his looming position behind me, protectively watching every moment the Darkbloods made. Sven and Rebecca stared at the dragon, frowning, before they looked to me for answers.

"He's the Prince's dragon pet. He's with me."

The two nodded, their similar tattoos rippling across their bodies as the Darkbloods began moving closer to the forest edge. Sven stopped right outside the tangle of bushes, dropping down in the dewy grass. Kai followed suit, allowing me to lean into his side as Rebecca and I sat down.

I sighed before beginning my shaky proposition.

"There's a ball happening at the Lightblood palace. It's going to be centered around me as a punishment for running from the Prince, which is a long story," I explained, dragging my fingers through the damp grass to keep myself distracted. "They want me to bring another Darkblood from this camp to show that we can work together. I think the Queen realizes that Lightbloods are beginning to lose faith in their side of the war."

Rebecca's golden eyes twinkled, brightening for a second. She growled, eyes flicking to the direction of the capital. My skin itched as my Darkblood form began to awaken, but my newly found control easily reigned it in.

*She's easily angered, and strong. Maybe Terrance is right.*

The werewolf, surprisingly, took several deep breaths without needing prompting. Her eyes darkened back to their usual dimness, focusing on me instead of the practically defenseless Lightbloods.

"So you want to bring one of us along to a ball to be judged and ridiculed," she stated, as if it was an accusation.

I gritted my teeth together, sitting straight. "I want to show that you are almost identical to them. That the Darkblood is just as good to have as Lightblood. I will have your back," I hissed, my voice firm. I would not have her mock me, not when I needed to gather up the courage to even come here in the first place.

"I want to bring you," I snapped at Rebecca, "but you need to *trust* me."

Rebecca shot to her feet, eyes wild. Her past calm was gone.

"You have no idea what it's like, Cloud," she snarled.

"I will *never* be hurt by them again."

# Cursed Blood - 34.A Werewolf's Pain.34[ 1,584 words ]

Rebecca hadn't come back. After her anger took over, she stomped off while growling, her fingernails elongating. Sven shot me a grim look before running after her as she shifted, the two of them disappearing into the woods. Behind me, my dragon companion was nuzzling my frozen form as I stood in shock.

"She's right," I mumbled to Kai, "I don't have any idea of what it's like being a Darkblood. I don't know anything. I don't *understand* any of this, so why was it *me*?"

My eyes watered, forcing me to rub them furiously. I was angry with myself, and ashamed. Some part of me must've been absolutely stupid if I thought a werewolf would be okay being surrounded by Lightbloods. A loud hiccup left my mouth as I continued rubbing away tears, trying to calm my shaking hands as Kai rubbed his head on my shoulder. The dragon purred, exactly like a cat, trying to calm me down. It wasn't long until my wings and other appendages shot from my skin, curling around me as I tried to comfort myself.

"I have to find her and make this right. I need to fix this," I decided, forcing back my tears. *I shouldn't be the one crying*, I thought, climbing up in Kai's back, carefully tucking in my wings.

"Can you follow her scent?" I asked the dragon, reaching out with my mind. I could feel Sven, but Rebecca had closed herself off. Determination surged through my veins as Kai's answer rung through my mind.

*Already on it.*

I grimaced as Kai shot off, sprinting through the camp like he knew it by hand. I frowned, glancing over my shoulder.

*I thought Rebecca went into the forest.*

Kai's grin was all mental, but just as smug. *She looped around. She's in this kind of building*, he answered, projecting a form of memory into my mind. It looked like a child's sketch of the main townhall, and my head whipped up. In the center of our path was the exact building. I hunched over, letting the wind pass overhead as Kai sprinted the last bit, skidding to a stop right outside the door. I was panting as I dismounted, running inside with Kai's words of encouragement in my mind.

Even I, with my zero experience in tracking, could follow the scent of the werewolf, and somehow sense her distress. It trailed to the room I'd been in, with Darkblood legends forever remembered with their faces covering the walls. I opened the door slowly, stepping through while surveying the room carefully. I'd never dealt with an angry, upset werewolf, and didn't want to have to fight for my own safety. Not against Rebecca, especially when I was in the wrong.

However, I didn't need to be cautious. The second I entered, I heard the sobs of the girl with her head on her arms as she leaned on the table, uncaring of the sound her sobs made. Her body shuddered each time she paused before another bout of crying began, her hands clenched into fists.

"Have you," she paused to sob, "come to laugh? To point your f-finger at me and o-order me around, Lightblood?"

I winced, but refused to let myself crumble. I needed to be level-headed, to apologize, but I couldn't take her lashing out at me to heart.

"I'm sorry, Rebecca. I didn't realize what I was asking of you," I apologized, taking a shaky step toward her. She whipped her head up, staring at me with golden eyes and long, pointed teeth sticking out of her mouth. Parts of her face were already being taken over by my fur, and I could see the shape of her ear trying to mold into a wolf's. "I-I still don't. But we can use this to our advantage. If they mock us, then they mock us. But we are better than them by trying to bring the two together."

"No," the werewolf snapped, her voice deeper. "We're not better than them because we're trying. We're better because we're *stronger*. As a Lightblood, *you* should know that. *You* should know what it's like to be at the level of a Lightblood, then shoot to the level of a Darkblood."

Rebecca tilted her head, getting to her feet. "How can you even trust me not to hurt any of them, Cloud? They're so weak -- I could easily turn on your plan and do a noble deed for my people by killing at least a few."

Her cheeks glistened in the light from her tears, her shoulders hunched as she remained halfway into the transformation into a wolf. I wanted to cringe, but held my ground.

"You were hurt by them, I get that now. But if you try to lay a finger on any one of them who willingly went to a party where Darkbloods would be," I began, stepping toward her until we were chest to chest. "I will stop you. In front of everyone. I will do it over and over again because that is what my *job* is."

Rebecca growled.

No, she thought, sending it with a ridiculous amount of force. My hands went to my temples, trying to soothe my mind as pain radiated through my head. It was enough time

for her to shift, the wolf easily knocking me down before I could comprehend what was happening. I had gotten rid of my Darkblood form coming in here to try and remain unthreatening, but now that I was on the floor, I wasn't sure if bringing out my wings would help or cause me pain by breaking them.

*You don't know what it's like, Cloud, the werewolf thought it my mind, balancing on me. Her backfeet were on my thighs, her front paws on either side of my head. She held her muzzle right above my throat, waiting to clamp down. You don't know the pain of hiding. Of having nowhere to go, of having to lie and then get caught for it. My parents were killed by Lightbloods at the age of seven. But you want to know somethin'?*

The wolf howled, throwing her head back before she kicked with her back leg, slicing through my thigh with her claws.

*I was expecting it. I knew my parents wouldn't survive. We were Darkbloods trying to live among Lightbloods in a small town. They were killed in the center of our hut, right before the hunters came to get me. I shifted, and that night, I made my first three kills. The other four that helped take down my parents are still out there, and one day I plan to kill them.*

Her anger radiated off of her in waves, suffocating me as I thrashed, blood pouring from my thigh. If it wasn't for superhuman regeneration, I would have begun to lose hope.

*After that, I pretended to be a lost Lightblood girl. I never shifted. Never showed signs of magic. Slow, stupid, clumsy. Everyone thought I was hopeless, but no one suspected me of being Darkblood.*

*That was until some Lightblood girl wanted to use me for target practice. She was a huntress, with the gift of heightened sight. Her eyes could see things the way an eagle could, but she would always just miss when I was the target. I had knicks on my sides, from top to bottom. Even ones on my head.*

*That happened on a daily for four years straight.*

I stopped thrashing, opening my eyes to look into Rebecca's. Her anger had begun to mellow, replaced by sadness. Pools of gold were blurred by tears as the wolf began to speak softly in my mind instead of harshly.

*Until one day, she actually missed. The shot went through my arm, and the pain caused my wolf side to explode. It was hard enough keeping it into control. The second I shifted, she shot at me for real.*

*That was my fourth kill.*

*The town knew by then, but the parents I had couldn't believe I was a Darkblood. They advocated to keep me alive but imprisoned, while everyone else wanted me dead.*

*And your lovely kingdom decided to improvise.*

The wolf stepped off me, glancing at the scratch on my thigh as I panted, rolling over and folding in on myself in pain as I waited for the rest of the story.

*Three years. Three years of having rotten things thrown at me. Years of being brought down from a cage hanging into the middle of town only to be beaten by children who were learning about exaggerated Darkblood monsters. Years of being ridiculed and damaged.*

Rebecca crumpled, her form melting away before she became a broken human girl sitting on the floor, her eyes holding a faraway look. I pushed myself up, watching her watch nothing.

"The tattoos," she began, meaning the marks she and Sven had on their arms, "are to cover up the bad scars that never faded, even with werewolf regeneration. If I was meant to bear them forever, I was going to at least bear them in a way I wanted."

My shoulders slumped forward as I exhaled.

"I'm sorry," I told her, this time pouring my heart and soul behind it. "I think the world has it wrong. Lightbloods are the monsters."

Rebecca shrugged, pulling her knees up to her chest. She rested her arms on them before putting her chin on her arms, staring at the floor.

"I don't think so. There are some good Lightbloods, and some good Darkbloods. But both sides have many, many monsters."

Her eyes flicked to mine, then my leg, then back to my own eyes.

"That's where we've always been equal."

## Cursed Blood - 35.Equals.35[ 1,333 words ]

Rebecca stared at me a moment longer before she took a glimpse at my leg. The wound was closed, with light scars in its place. She sighed before gently running a finger down her arm, hitting several of the tattoo spots. Her own light scars that never faded. Gently, she began wiping away the blood, using the fabric of her shirt. When I protested, she waved me off. I held my tongue, watching her work diligently until it was gone, ignoring the quick bit of spit that she used to hurry up the process.

"How long does it take to do one of those tattoos?" I wondered, pointing to the ones on her arms. She paused, frowning for a second.

"Well, mine are the puzzle pieces of a clan symbol from long ago. Usually the tattoos are only big enough to cover the scar, so not very long," Rebecca eventually answered, offering me a hand as she got to her feet. I accepted it, affectionately squeezing. She smiled before giving me a one armed hug, showing that our fight was resolved. Though I still felt horrible, I couldn't be happier that she still tolerated me. I briefly sent a wave of relief to Kai to let him know I was okay before turning my full attention back to the werewolf who was still frowning at me.

"Why do you ask?" She added, crossing her arms.

I grinned. "I have to be back by tonight, but if we have enough time, I thought that maybe I could get the scar tattooed."

Rebecca frowned some more, wrinkles appearing between her brows. "Why? It may fade in time."

Taking her hand again, I motioned to the tattoos travelling up her skin. "We're equals. I want to adopt your traditions, because I belong to Darkbloods as well," I explained, admiring the ink decorating her arm. She sighed, squeezing my hand, and began to drag me from the room.

"Fine. But I get to pick the tattoo. And also," she continued, stopping just before the door. Rebecca glanced over her shoulder at me, eyes cautious.

"My past isn't something I love or that I'm proud of," she said coldly, "so please don't mention it to anyone else."

I nodded, already well ahead of her. "I'd never bring that pain up again."

The werewolf considered the truth behind my words, searching my expression for a hint of disloyalty.

She found none.

Rebecca finally displayed a true smile, her dark mood gone quicker than I expected, and pulled me along. While I was confused on where Sven had gone, I was happy enough to take Rebecca to Kai so that he could push through the crowds of Darkbloods for us. She mounted in front of me, giving him telepathic directions as I watched people go by, each one with their own power. It reminded me of the Darkbloods' Blood Festival that Kai had mentioned, especially when children began chasing each other with gnarly teeth, flaming hair and vines for arms. To some it may have looked insane, but to me, it felt a bit like home. The insanity reminded me of what it was like to grow up in a family of six, which was worse since there were four boys. My brothers had always been a handful, though Terrance and Warren were the worst for each other. As I remembered distant childhood memories, I swore I could smell the scent of fresh dirt used to farm back home, even if there were no gardens around us.

I smiled as Rebecca told Kai to stop, the dragon obeying her because I had asked him nicely to. He mentioned that dragons and other animalistic Darkbloods usually fought for dominance, but he was kind enough to comply to the werewolf. I patted his side, catching a hint of amusement from him as he backed himself in next to the hut where Rebecca was headed, patiently setting down.

*I'll be waiting*, he told me as I rushed to catch up with the werewolf. I flashed him a thumbs-up before disappearing inside the hut, following my newfound friend. Inside were three tables, all set up with tools for creating ink masterpieces. A boy around our age was seated at one, talking to Rebecca, when I entered.

"Hello," he greeted me, getting to his feet. "I'm Zen. It's nice to meet you."

"My pleasure," I replied, reaching for his hand. His grip was firm, almost intimidating. Rebecca watched us with a small, amused smile on her face before she began bouncing around in excitement.

"I already told Zen what you're getting on your leg. Also, he's a Darkblood with astral magic. He can make all these starry copies of himself that fight like there's no tomorrow," she rambled, clearly a little too excited about whatever was being put on my leg. I raised an eyebrow, glancing at the boy. He shrugged, smirking as he glanced over at Rebecca. I followed his eyes until I saw an exact replica of him, but instead the colours of a night sky, appear behind Rebecca. The copy grabbed her, causing her to jump in fear, whirling around. Only it had disappeared by then. She glared at Zen, who was trying to stifle his laughter.

"Should we start?" I giggled, patting Rebecca's shoulder as I sat down at the table. Zen nodded, sitting next to me. He fiddled with the equipment as Rebecca sat on my other side, both of us watching him in mild interest. When he was finished, he asked me to show him exactly where the scar was. I paused, glancing around for something to rest my leg on when Rebecca rolled her eyes, walking around the table. I squeaked as she grabbed my leg, putting it in Zen's lap. Expecting him to react negatively, I tried to take my leg back, but he gently stopped me.

"This is probably the best position actually," he reassured me, "don't worry about it. But this may hurt."

I nodded, watching as he began to tattoo something on my leg until Rebecca turned my face toward her.

"It's a surprise," she scolded me, "no looking!"

I rolled my eyes, looking around the shop as tiny stabs of pain travelled up my leg. However, the process seemed short, as it wasn't long until Zen gently tapped my shoulder, his hand holding a cloth over my leg.

"Ready to see it?" He asked both of us. I glanced at Rebecca for permission, her nod showing the excitement that I could feel radiating off of her.

My eyes widened as he removed the cloth, not even believing the work he'd created.

They were wings, folded in the way that they did when they were resting at my sides. Outlined in the darkest black I'd seen, filled in with a slightly lighter shade. He'd drawn them on an angle so that the curves pointed toward the center of my stomach, but that wasn't all he did. The tattoo covered more than needed, because he'd drawn them so that it truly looked like the ink was slowly dripping down my leg, with the wings' tips extending until they became drops. I couldn't believe my eyes, and began to run my hands over the image. The redness was already fading as superhuman healing kicked in, leaving a flawless image.

"Becca said it's meant to represent you, of course. The black angel wings are your main Darkblood feature, and the drops aren't just ink, but meant to be interpreted as the blood you have as well. Give her the credit," Zen explained, cleaning off his tools as I examined my leg. Part of me *had* been sad about the loss of a pair of pants, but now I felt the urge to only wear pants with holes in them so that my tattoo could be displayed. I threw myself at Zen, enclosing him in a short hug before pouncing on Rebecca, squeezing her tight.

"Thank you, Rebecca," I whispered.

"Jeez, call me Becca," she scolded playfully, grinning. "After all, I may just be your date to a ball."

## Cursed Blood - 36.A Dragon's Power.36[ 1,402 words ]

Shortly after my tattoo was finished, we were waving goodbye to Zen and stepping back out into the last rays of sunshine. I turned to Rebecca, putting my hand on her arm.

"The only reason I'm inviting *only* you is because I knew that in a large group of Darkbloods, at least one would lash out for revenge," I told her, "but I trusted you enough that you'd have my back and help me change their minds about these people, at least in this camp. But I recognize that things go deeper than petty hatred, and if it's going to be hard for you, I don't want to put you through that."

The werewolf smiled, crinkles appearing in the corners of her golden eyes. She grabbed my hand, removing it from her arm, and gently returned it to my side. Kai, who had

waited diligently, was watching us from around the corner, his violet eyes searching mine for a need of aid. I subtly shook my head, and watched him settle back around the corner.

"Cloud," Rebecca said, gaining my attention, "if you have my back, no one can touch me. I trust you."

I nodded, trying to calm my nerves. She patted my shoulder before turning away, heading for the bonfire pits. I watched her go, feeling a strange sense of mischief that wasn't my own. It reminded me of something else, something I couldn't quite put my finger on.

*You can sense them, Storm-Cloud, Kai said in my mind, slithering around the corner gracefully, propping his head up by resting it on a pot for plants. You feel waves of their emotions, and can sense their pain or sickness.*

I raised an eyebrow. His words made sense now that my memories were falling into place, but one thing threw me off.

*How did you know that?*

The dragon chuckled, smoke pouring from his mouth. He settled down further, and I swore I could hear the weak pot creaking.

*We dragons have been around for a long time, Storm-Cloud. My suspicion is that you weren't born pure Lightblood at all. Your form and the symbols of power you radiate have signs of many different common Darkblood types, but too many considering the theory is that you were given Darkblood.*

The dragon sighed, glancing up at me.

*Dragons have the ability to talk to any spirit that was alive during their lifetime, whether they knew them or not, he explained, pushing himself up. He brought his face close to mine, snorting playfully, but I was too engrossed in his words to laugh or smile. Therefore I know a thing or two.*

*You were born with no power, Storm-Cloud. There were two blood types in you, and one was going to kill you. That was until a Darkblood happened to kidnap you and give you more Darkblood, which set off a reaction in your body.*

*You're alive because of these people. You're extraordinary, Storm-Cloud, but you owe it to the Darkbloods.*

I turned away, looking down at my hands. Questions of *how* were on the tip of my tongue, but at this point, I didn't think it mattered. What mattered now was getting the Lightbloods and Darkbloods to work together before the Gray War had a chance to begin.

*Your brother will not be the last.*

I grimaced, keeping my eyes low as I mounted my dragon companion. The words would never leave my brain.

*Unless, I thought, she is a spirit who was alive during Kai's lifetime. Then maybe I could talk to her, in a way.*

"Kai," I said urgently as he began walking in the direction of the forest. He paused, craning his blue scaled neck to look back at me. "Do you think we could try to reach a spirit?"

*What for?*

"One visited me. Gave me a message. I want to speak with her."

He looked away, eyes hovering over nothing as he processed my words. Finally, the dragon shook out his singular wing and began to trot off, slowly gaining speed as he went. By the time we were in the forest, he was zipping around trees like it was a clear path, never getting hit or having to stop. I hunched over, keeping myself close to his back. His wing folded close to me for extra protection, making sure I was still holding on tight. Eventually, I noticed our direction. Kai had begun running from the camp *and* the Valley, heading to a third location I had no clue about. I hadn't explored any of Terrafell beside the Valley, I hadn't even explored that much of Mythira. The entire world was still new to me, but by the looks of it, one day it would be familiar. After all, I couldn't just unite the Darkbloods and Lightbloods of the Valley.

This was worldwide, and a daunting task, but I wouldn't let myself fall into the same curse the others did.

I crouched lower as Kai managed to increase in speed, his feet a blur as we narrowly missed a few trees. He didn't slow until the end of the forest came into view, and even then he was still faster than I would've been.

The trees spat us out into a large section of grass with short hills. Kai motioned for me to dismount and I jumped off, watching him stride toward the hills. He perched on one, eyes above him as the grass around him seemed to lighten in colour, almost glowing. I watched as he inhaled, pausing. My eyes widened as he bowed his head, only to let out a blast of green fire. It scorched the ground ahead of him, the heat reaching as far as I was, nearly in the trees. Purple, glowing eyes found mine as his fire breath died away, leaving behind the perfect circle of scorched earth. That was when green light began to glow from inside Kai, seeping through his scales until he stood like a lantern, the light dancing along the burned circle.

*Who is it, Storm-Cloud?*

My mind flashed to the time in the hall. The chilling voice that heeded a warning. One that owned the face of an ordinary girl.

I projected that memory into his mind, and the dragon shuddered once before the light exploded from him.

Just as quick as it happened, the glowing was gone, and the grass had regrown. It was like the time had gone back to before Kai had begun breathing green fire, the dragon slumped against the hill.

"Kai!" I screamed, barreling toward him. My wings shot out and I leapt, landing next to his head. His breath was uneven as he opened his eyes, glancing up at me. Like he said, I could feel the pain coming from him. It was in his head, and I knew if I tried to speak in his mind he wouldn't hear me.

Gently, he shifted until his head was in my lap. Suddenly, I found myself wishing I was like Charles. If only my brother was here -- his Lightblood ability to give energy would've been helpful for Kai. I leaned forward, cradling the dragon's head as I envisioned Charles' ability. The way it would cause a person's cheeks to flush and a smile to appear on their face.

*Storm-Cloud?* A hesitant voice said in my mind. Kai's eyes were back open, his breathing easier. I leaned back, eyes wide. There was a tingling in my fingers, but soon it died away.

"Are you alright?" I asked frantically, snapping back to reality. Kai slowly gathered his feet underneath him, rising back up. His neck remained bent, his head hanging low as he shuddered.

*I pushed too hard. The spirit was alive just before me, so I barely missed her and tried too many times to push my limits. I was just exhausted,* he thought, glancing at me, *but you somehow replaced my energy. Renewed it.*

I frowned, crossing my arms. My torn pants allowed the cold breeze to blow over my tattoo, the wings dripping down my skin.

"My brother has that kind of ability. He can give and take energy. I was just thinking of him," I explained, glancing at my hands. I could feel the ghost of a tickling sensation in my fingertips. There was a nag at the back of my mind, the feeling of Kai trying to peek into my thoughts. I glared at the dragon, watching as he looked away sheepishly.

*I think we're finding out some more about your Darkblood magic, Storm-Cloud.*

## Cursed Blood - 37.A Crying Girl.37[ 1,357 words ]

Thanks to Charles' power that I had somehow used, Kai was able to get us back to the farm in no time. Our things were already gone when I arrived, a sign out front saying the

land would be up for sale. According to my dragon friend, almost everyone had left for the castle long before sunset began, and were probably expecting me. I, however, could sense the pain of someone who hadn't left yet.

"Let me just check it out," I snapped as Kai reminded me that I was supposed to be heading back. He grumbled, sitting outside the old house as I ascended the porch stairs and reached for the doorknob. Instead of being locked, the front door was open, and I stepped into the dark house as quietly as possible. The feeling of pain, something that was radiating from someone's chest, led me to the kitchen where I found a woman sitting at the table, her head on her arms as she cried. I saw no blood or signs of attack, and realize I was feeling her emotional pain.

*Awkward*, I thought, but also realized it was probably going to cause trouble in she camped out in the house we just moved out of. I cleared my throat, trying to alert her to my presence without scaring her.

Nothing. No reaction.

I coughed.

She sobbed.

I gently tapped my foot against the floorboards.

She began to wail, pounding her fists on the table.

Eventually I had enough of the back and forth and began to growl, balling my hands into fists. She continued to cry, the sobs ringing in my ears and causing a headache.

"Oh my god -- *hello?!!*" I finally screamed. The girl's head whipped up and around at a speed I nearly couldn't see, her face clear of tears. Her eyes weren't red or puffy, and she was now sitting up straight.

I also recognized her.

The spirit in the hall. The one Kai risked himself to try and contact. Her eyes searched mine, and whatever she saw in them caused her to smile.

"Hello," she answered softly. She didn't move an inch, but the chair beside hers began to slide out from the table. I began to notice that the air was too still, and that it was dead silent now that her sobs had stopped. Her hands were pale and delicate, the light almost passing through them as she waved for me to sit. Without even realizing what I was doing, I strolled over to the table, moving with grace that was alien to me.

"I thought it would take much longer for us to meet," the woman began, laying her hands on the table, "but here we are. It's nice to see you again, dear. We have much to talk about."

Once I found my voice, I noticed my senses had returned to me and that I could think clearly. My first reaction was to run, but I kept myself rooted to the spot. If anyone was going to give me answers, it was the phantom.

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice soft as to not break the tranquility of my home. It didn't even feel like we were really there, and I had a feeling we weren't.

"Is that really what you want to know? You want to know about me, and not about yourself?" She asked, her eyes narrowing. She was gauging my reaction, trying to see how I'd retaliate to her words.

I straightened, slipping on a poker face. We stared at each other for a moment, both of us trying to figure out the other.

"You know the answers," I pointed out, "and I will want to be able to find you again. So I need to know who you are."

A grin broke out on her face. "My name is meaningless. But I am the girl of the war. Gavin and Joseph were my friends."

I looked away, remember Rebecca's story. "So it's true then?" I asked, my eyes finding the windows in the kitchen. Instead of seeing dark farm land in the middle of the night, it was a blur of darkness. The room was suspended in time, detached from reality, and I could feel my palms sweat in fear.

"It all is," she replied, her voice still warm despite the topic. "You seem afraid, Cloud. Even though you're the Gray One."

"Is it obvious?" I laughed dryly, clenching my hands into fists. "You sound surprised that I'm afraid."

The girl, a spirit who'd left this world long ago, sighed. I studied her face, watching her movements. Two clans had gone to war for her, and all she'd represented. They died for her, but even after their sacrifice, she didn't survive it.

"People act in funny ways," she told me, as if it answered my question. "Even you, the Gray One, with all your power and glory, are afraid of the woman who failed where you succeeded. I wonder how you did it."

"I wonder how you lived."

I looked away, staring at the smooth table. It's like we were in a doll house.

"I was supposedly born like this. With both blood types. It was going to kill me as a child, but then I was conveniently yet unpleasantly kidnapped and given more Darkblood that set a reaction off and awoke my Lightblood ability of immunity, basically. Years later, suddenly the Darkblood is awake as well," I explained, piecing together the parts of what I knew and what I had been told. Telling the spirit the entire thing put it into a bit more perspective, despite it still seeming impossible to me.

Her eyes slowly trailed to mine, wide in admiration. They seemed to take on the colours of a starry sky, with flecks of white in irises of blue and purple. She reminded me of Kai, causing my heart to skip a beat in concern. Where did he think I was?

"Her wishes were fulfilled," the spirit murmured. She rose from her chair, walking toward the window. Her eyes landed on nothing, but she still stared at the blur of colour.

"What do you know about the creation of Lightbloods and Darkbloods?"

That was an easy answer. "Light belongs to the half of the species with divine blessings and blood. Dark is the opposite, with the blood and gifts of demons."

Her head tilted, seemingly of its own will, as she leaned forward and gently tapped her nose against the window, trying to see something outside. I could feel my worry increase, since I was at a loss for what she was doing, but forced myself to remain calm.

"Do you know any gods?"

"No," I admitted, "we rarely talk about that in school anymore. It's mostly history of the war and trying to brainstorm ways to revive Lightblood abilities."

The woman turned, frowning as she crossed her arms and leaned against the windowsill. "They teach you nothing of the gods?"

I shook my head, causing her to sigh. She came back to the table, this time sitting across from me.

"I can't tell you the rest until you know who began this all," she said softly, reaching out until she clasped my hand within hers. I expected her palms to be soft, or not even solid, but they were rough and callused.

I squeezed her hand, unable to let go. She knew the answers, but she was trying to refuse to tell me.

"If you know what is happening, tell me," I pleaded, "let me know what I should do. I don't know what I'm doing!"

As fast as she moved previously, the girl had gone from her side of the table to kneeling next to me. Her hands held my face as she spoke slowly, an unconditional look of love in her eyes.

"Just find the gods. When you can tell me who *She* is, your answers will be given to you. I'll wait here," the spirit told me, her form slowly vanishing. The feeling of rough skin on my cheeks gradually disappeared, and the blur of the world outside the windows refocused to become the real world. Defeated, I rose from my seat and dragged my feet to the door.

And as I passed through, the crying began again.

## Cursed Blood - 38.Mindless.38[ 1,324 words ]

That night, her cries kept me awake. The feeling of the answers looming out of reach haunted my thoughts every time I closed my eyes. Everything was in place, but nothing was clear. How could I find out who 'She' was if 'She' was connected to a group I knew nothing about. I couldn't sleep as the answers remained laid out for me, yet so elusive.

Eventually, I gave up. I sat up and tossed off my blankets. I had already settled back in to my room at the castle, and the rest of the Rose family was enjoying their new spaces. Kai didn't stir as I stomped to my closet and pulled on old leathers I brought from home, not bothering to tie back my mane of hair that frizzed around my face. Quietly, I managed to slip around the dragon who insisted on always sleeping just inside my room, nearly blocking the door. Once I was free, I began to make my way to the front of the castle where morning practices took place. The memory of meeting Kyra for the first time, a bitchy red dragon, fueled my frustration even more as I pushed through the heavy doors. As I expected, equipment had been lazily pushed up against the side of the castle where it was safe but still accessible. I rummaged through it until I found the dummy setups and wooden weapons, which were good enough for me. After spending more time than needed struggling to put the dummies together, I began to hack away at them with a wooden sword. No powers were in sight, not when they were the cause of my problems. I slashed and jabbed at the crude 'person,' panting and sweating as it began to fall apart from my brutal attacks. However, I had to admit it was therapeutic. I felt my mind drift away as I hit something solid over and over, my thoughts evaporating into mindless repetition. It was good practice as well, and I even switched between hands as I worked away at using up my anger.

By the time I felt exhaustion seep in, the sun had begun to rise. My sweat dried on my skin, and I was beginning to see that my leathers were going to be too warm for the approaching summer weather. I grimaced, considering whether or not I'd have to wear dresses.

"Is the dummy that disappointing that you have to grimace at him?"

I whirled around, lifting my practice sword. Across from me was Dmitri, the Darkblood specialist. Someone I hadn't seen in a while, but still tolerated, and sadly, still found extremely attractive.

I looked away, blushing at my own thoughts. *Inappropriate!* I scolded myself, running my hand along my neck. Underneath my hair was a pool of sweat that I gagged at, causing the specialist to laugh.

"You don't usually hack at things all night, do you Cloud?" Dmitri teased. I crossed my arms, lifting a brow.

"How did you know I was here all night?"

He shrugged. "The dummy. You sweating. The fact that it's just become dawn. You also seem to have a lot of your mind," he listed, counting them on his fingers. He then looked up at me, smiling. "You're not the only one who blows off steam by mindlessly hitting things."

I looked away, this time blushing from embarrassment. On the other hand, I couldn't deny that letting off steam had helped my thoughts find peace. There were libraries in this castle -- I would find them and learn what I could. Then I would sneak away to meet with the woman, who I thought of as Spirit, and get my answers.

Then maybe I'd know what I wanted to do, and which side deserved my help. Or maybe I'd figure out *how* I'm actually supposed to bring the two bloods together. Either way, I would visit Spirit again.

"Why are you here so early?" I countered, glancing at Dmitri before starting the process of cleaning up the broken dummy. He watched, smiling in amusement as I picked up pieces of wood and torn cloth.

The man shrugged, running a hand through his hair. His eyes, a strange colour that was almost caramel, were fixated on my every movement. "I like to start warm-ups before everyone else. Most of the Lightbloods don't even stretch before they begin sparring. Not only are the offensive abilities dwindling away, but we train improperly as well."

Initially, I was surprised by the wise observations. Then I realized, once again, that he was a specialist, and it was his job to be smart. I shook my head, grinning as I returned the wooden weapons to their bag slumped against the castle. Dmitri remained where he was, watching me just as curiously as I watched him.

"Go on," I prodded, "do your warm-ups. Go have fun, *kid*."

Dmitri rolled his eyes, loosening up his neck and shoulders. He raised his eyebrows, staring at me with a challenge in his eyes.

"You seem a little fiesty, Cloud. Can you even back up those words? You're the kid here," Dmitri snapped, amusement in his eyes despite his offended tone. The warrior then caused my cheeks to redden as he shed his leather tunic, allowing the sunlight to shine on his bare skin. I looked away, trying to peer down on the people in the Valley instead of staring at the abdomen of the specialist.

"Shy, Cloud?"

I growled, bringing myself back to the time when Dmitri teased me about being a werewolf -- but I wasn't one. I had proven to be more than that. Stronger, with more power than I knew. More questions as well.

"No," I spat, "but I have dignity. And you're being such a twelve year old right now, Dmitri."

From the corner of my eye, I saw him open his arms, as if inviting me to fight with him. My growl deepened, and I pushed away any inappropriate thoughts as I lifted my gaze to stare at Dmitri.

"What a lovely show," I snickered, "but it's unimpressive. Get to work."

I turned away, heading for the doors. My stomach was grumbling, begging for something to fill it.

However, I stopped immediately as Dmitri planted himself in front of me, the blade of a very real sword against my neck. It glinted in the sunlight, warm against my skin as he grinned at me. I growled again, lunging back so that I was out of the way of his blade.

Dmitri smirked, giving his blade a few testing swings. I snarled, fingers folding into fists at my side. "Back off, Dmitri. Unless you want me to make fun of you some more."

He rolled his eyes. "Enough talk, Cloud. You want to mock me? Do it. *Only* if you can kick my ass first -- *not* in Darkblood. You're meant to be a soldier, you know," he pointed out. I sighed, moving back to where the dummy had been set up, watching as he sauntered toward me while swinging his blade.

*A fist versus blade fight? Hardly fair*, I thought, positioning myself to be on guard. My instinct was to reach for the power of my blood, but I faltered. This was me as a soldier. Not a Darkblood.

Dmitri lunged at me, and I dodged it with ease. However, I couldn't attack. I didn't know how, I was still a Lightblood girl who was immune, and untrained.

*Am I supposed to learn and dodge at the same time?* I thought frantically as I slid under a jab to the throat. The unison of the two bloods had given me better physical abilities just by nature, ones that didn't count as Darkblood. That meant I could probably last by just dodging for quite a while, but I could never defeat him by evading him constantly. We would both tire out.

I set my jaw, scowling as I bounced away from his attack.

This would take some time to work around.

## Cursed Blood - 39. Annoyances.39[ 1,111 words ]

I was sweating, droplets dampening my collar. My neck was on fire, the heat trapped by my mane of hair that stuck to it. The temperature did nothing to help me as I watched Dmitri closely, gauging his attacks. He was dead set on beating me and making me eat my words, and I was determined to fight my way out of this. Fists or sword, wings or tail. I would learn to fight.

Faster than I could react, Dmitri swung his blade in an expert combo. Instinct took over and I snarled, lifting my arms to try and block a *blade*. It cut through my arm, but he was able to stop himself before doing real damage. He dropped the sword, prepared to take me to the infirmary, when suddenly, the wound began to close over. Quicker than anything had even healed, even for me. A blast of light hit my vision, causing me to stumble as memories flashed in my mind. Chains, locked boxes, the annoying sounds of rattling keys. A dark cell, and syringes. Blood.

As quick as it happened, the feeling passed. The thinnest scar was left behind, but that too was fading. I shook out my hands, staring back at Dmitri as he searched me for signs of my Darkblood half.

"Wasn't me," I muttered, then I lunged. His sword was still on the ground, wet with blood. He wasn't quick enough to use his fists as I flew at him, striking his throat. As he choked, I used the momentum to kick his jaw, and continued to turn as my fist flew toward his gut. It was a flawless combo I remembered the soldiers practicing before, when I'd met Kyra.

Dmitri coughed, blood coming from his mouth. My eyes widened, and I realized I could probably hit much harder than a regular Lightblood who didn't have my gifts. My attacks instantly stopped, but I made sure to pick up the sword before approaching Dmitri. He kneeled, calming his breathing.

I barely heard him whisper "*gotcha*" before he lunged, diving from his sword. I dropped my shoulder and met him half way, his chest ramming into the hard bone. Wincing, I dug my ankles in and pushed back, bringing the sword in to hit the hilt off his stomach. The force of it all drove Dmitri back, his teeth exposed as he grinned like a madman.

"Already improving, Cloud?" He sneered, and I growled. Sweat dripped down his brow, his chest heaving as he rubbed at his stomach. I snorted, rather ungracefully, and lunged for him. Dmitri matched me blow for blow, though we blocked most of each other's attacks. I had a noticable advantage, but didn't know how to use it. We went back and forth until I felt a spark in my fingertips, and claws nearly shot from my fingers. I flipped back, with even newer agility, and shook out my hand until my nerves relaxed.

"No Darkblood," Dmitri warned me, crossing his arms. I rolled my eyes, clenching my regular hand into fists.

"Better. Let's finish this."

The specialist paused, his emotions showing through as he seemed to glare at me in anger. What would have once caused me to worry about what I was now gave me the confidence. When fear was in their eyes, whether they be Darkblood or Lightblood, it meant they recognized and respected my power. It meant I had the upper hand, and even without wings, I was still worth that respect.

*I see your fear*, I thought, and as the thought developped in my mind, I noticed one of my extra senses picking up. It was the one that allowed me to pinpoint his pain, and I began to feel it radiate from his torso where I'd hit him, and his arms.

*He's in pain because of the heavy blocks that happen during our hand to hand*, I realized, ducking underneath his neck attack. I rolled past him, not bothering to try and sweep his legs. Instead I bounced up, reaching a high enough height that I could see the top of his head. My fist came down on the soft flesh in between his shoulder and neck, and I heard him groan in pain as he fell to a knee. This time, I used my feet. He landed on his throbbing shoulder in the ruined grass once my foot connected with the back of his knee, and I grinned in victory.

"Now you have to stop calling me a kid," I said as he slowly picked himself up, mud stuck to his skin. I blushed, looking away as he turned toward me. My pride from winning melted away until I was left with childish embarrassment.

Dmitri smirked, but groaned in pain as well. "You learn quickly, Cloud. I'm surprised they haven't made you the Prince's bodyguard."

I rolled my eyes, turning away from him. When I walked toward the edge of the mountain, he followed out of curiosity, and when I sat down, he did too. We sat side by side, right after trying to beat the crap out of each other, and looked out of the kingdom's Valley together.

"I could never be his bodyguard," I muttered, "because the surprises will never stop coming. It's annoying. The second I feel like I'm understanding what's happening, something else comes to knock me over the head. I can't control myself, or my life. Not anymore."

"You'd think the all-powerful Gray One would control her own life," Dmitri mused, nudging me with his arm. I swatted him away, dangling my feet over the edge of the mountain. Fear of falling was nonexistent for me -- I had trust in the wings hidden in my back. I knew that if I did fall, they would be there to rescue me. My power would always be there to defend me.

*But why?*

*Strange thought to have considering that's already been explained to me. Why I have this power makes sense now. So what am I still so confused about?*

*Why does it never fail,* my mind echoed back at me. I glanced down at my hands, wondering why I couldn't fathom my power never breaking on me.

"You didn't have power before, right?" Dmitri suddenly asked. I nodded, still staring at my hands.

"Control may be hard," he continued, "but you're confused because you don't trust your power, not really. You trust it enough to save you, but you're expecting it to disappear one day. It's because you didn't grow up with it. Us Lightbloods grow up with our magic, and it grows alongside us. You never had that."

"And? Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

Dmitri sighed.

"It won't abandon you, Cloud. Just know that."

## **Cursed Blood - 40.Revealed Discoveries.40[ 1,167 words ]**

After finally getting breakfast -- albeit it was with Dmitri -- I managed to find myself happily worn out and wandering the castle. My brothers and father were busy all day with tours, and I didn't think I was allowed out of the castle grounds until the ball was over. One option was to train more, but I was already tired and couldn't fathom more sparing.

"Excuse me."

I turned around to see woman in a fancy dress waiting patiently behind me. I cleared my throat before bowing my head to her, unsure of her position in the castle. She smiled, dropping into a curtsy before straightening up until her posture resembled a ruler.

"I am Janora, one of the Lady Garcia's escorts. It is my pleasure to meet you, Ms. Rose," the girl said pleasantly, giving me a quick once over. She pursed her lips before motioning for me to follow her, her skirts swishing around her in a perfect movement whenever she walked. Janora kept a close eye on my movements, constantly sizing me up. I grimaced when she looked away, knowing I was sweaty and probably dirty, even after breakfast and getting changed.

Since the weather was beginning to become hot and dry, I had traded my sweaty leather clothing in for a dress, surprisingly. It was a plain combination of sky blue and a light lavender, with a classic bodice and a skirt that barely passed my knee. Instead of tough boots, I wore comfortable black flats that made me slide on smooth floors. Janora's outfit was much more fitting for a royal setting -- she wore a jewelled dress of white and green, her skirt brushing the floor. While my chocolate hair ran down my back in unorganized waves, her own silky hair was pinned back in an elegant updo.

Compared to her, I looked a little like a rat.

Sighing without making any noise, I tilted my chin up as if I didn't notice the difference between us and followed Janora into a side room near the throne room. Inside, there were bookshelves upon bookshelves, with desks in the back of the room. One desk had a chair on either side of it, with Lillian Garcia occupying one. Lillian the Generous, the warrior who made sure her opponents were truly dead all while doing everything she could for her people without asking for much in return. She may have been a sassy character in person, but I knew the title suited her.

Janora swept in beside me, dropping into a perfect curtsy. "Lady Garcia, I present Ms. Rose, as you requested."

Lillian glanced up with a cheeky grin. She waved me over, the open chair for me. I sat down as gracefully as possible, lessons my mother briefly taught me in my mind. Normally, I wasn't one to be prim and proper -- I was a farm girl.

"It's good to see you again, Cloud. Especially when there's no one around to make this traumatic for you," Lillian joked, though it was rather embarrassing for me. I bowed my head, remembering the breakfast we had where a maid was quivering at my feet. The worst instance in which I began to feel like a monster.

I looked away with a frown, trying to push away my guilt.

Lillian took one look at my face and her grin fell. "Sorry, Cloud. Touchy subject, also, not what you're here for. Her Majesty asked me to get you up-to-date on what Darkblood matters we've been looking into, and Janora and I will be your personal tutors," she said

with a weak smile, trying to soothe my sadness. I exhaled slowly, raising my eyes to meet hers.

"Thank you for your help, uh, Lady Garcia."

She winked. "Janora may call me that, but you can call me Lillian."

I nodded, looking at the books around us. Janora, as if predicting the future, took a file from one of the other desks and handed it to Lillian. The renowned warrior flipped through it, sliding it around so that I could read the written notes. It was all about several Darkblood camps around the area, while the other page was some sort of plan involving me. My eyes scanned the page about Darkbloods, picking out various things.

"Confirmed six camps near the Valley. All leaders are accounted for with the exception of one. Currently twenty-seven missing Lightbloods suspected of being somewhere in these camps. Approximately at least two hundred Darkbloods in total in the six camps, with only seven known powers.' Who got all this stuff?!" I practically shrieked, continuing to read through the file on Darkbloods. It wasn't the worst situation, but it seemed obvious that us Lightbloods were ill-informed.

Glancing at my file, I saw a family history section and several theories about how I came to be. There were also all possible notes about my powers that have been confirmed. The only thing missing was what the spirit told me, and Rebecca's story. At least, it wasn't in the file I was allowed to see. One thing I did notice, however, were several things written in the margin of the paper.

Angel. War of Gods.

Gorgeous.

The first two that stuck in my head had a different handwriting than the last one, though that one meant the most to me. It caused me to blush, and I felt my face go pink as I shoved the files back to Lillian. "T-Thank you Lady Garcia."

"Lillian," she corrected again. "And don't bother giving me that. I have two other copies. Keep this, Cloud."

Blushing, I took the hastily passed file back, tucking all the pages into their places. I'll read more into it later, I told myself, glancing from Janora to Lillian.

The woman sighed. "Time for lessons, I guess. Are you ready, Cloud?"

I swallowed, scratching the back of my head. "Will this be hard?" I asked hesitantly.

She snickered, rolling her eyes before beckoning for Janora to retrieve another book.

"Just you wait."

### **Quick Author's note!**

**I missed a few updates, whoops :)**

**I have been working on the 50th chapter of Cursed Blood AND another book by me that will be coming out soon so I have been skipping certain upload days just so that I can clean and polish up a few things. There isn't much more to the reason than that, so I'm sorry.**

**I don't have much else to say, I just wanted to let that be known, but I will say that chapters will probably start getting longer as we get toward chapter 50, and that no this doesn't mean that the end is coming soon. Not even close!**

**The only reason this book is going on as long as it will be going on for is because the series system in the Beta FindNovel.net writing app doesn't work as smoothly as I'd hoped so I will be putting all of Cloud's story into one long book. Future projects will hopefully be in actual series, but I can never be sure.**

**So yeah! Expect a lot more to come, and I will talk to you in the future :)**