

Cursed Blood - 51.A Demon's Ball.51[1,233 words]

Dmitri was quick to sweep me away. My skirt moved around me like I was a bell, beautiful fabric glinting underneath the light of the chandeliers. I smiled despite feeling hesitant, resting my fangs against my lips as Dmitri pulled me in. While I hadn't done much dancing before, my natural balance kicked in and I managed to follow his lead without many problems. His right hand rested on my bare lower back, his left hand holding my right. My other hand rested on his shoulder, and I noticed how we fit together even with the wings and the scabbard. As we waltzed to the music, people began to clear away, and pairs joined us. The ball was officially underway as there were less people snacking and more dancing, the pairs forming several circles within circles. Even Queen Amara joined, dancing with one of her elderly advisers. I spotted Rebecca with Charles, and noticed the twins staring at the two on the sidelines. Their expressions were clouded with frustration, and I unknowingly began to pull away until Dmitri stopped me.

"Cloud, just have fun for tonight," he told me, the steps picking up in pace and difficulty. "You can deal with all the problems you have tomorrow. But tonight, just dance. This is *your* ball, after all. The Prince did this for you."

"As a punishment," I spat, though I did relax a bit. Without even realizing it, I was matching him step for step, and twirled with ease when he spun me. "I didn't ask for a ball."

He chuckled, our steps pulling us past the twins and my father. They smiled at me, though it was weak. I also noticed Janora and Raeni, who were watching me with motherly gazes. I bit the inside of my cheek at the thought of my mother, willing the emotions that came along with it away. Dmitri was right -- this was my ball.

"A demon's ball," I said quietly. "The Prince let the demon girl have her own ball so that everyone can see her and be afraid."

He shrugged. "Maybe that's the case, but they can never control you, Cloud. This is your ball, do what you want with it."

"I want to have fun," I replied simply.

Dmitri winked at me, and my heart did a strange flip. Instead of talking, he began to do an expert pattern of steps, and our tempo increased. We had been in a large circle of dancing pairs, but Dmitri guided us into the center and began to twirl me every few steps. I expected to be dizzy, but an elegant, regal side of me made itself known as I kept up with my mischievous partner. The music grew louder, and everywhere I looked there were eyes on us. Queen Amara and her advisor were soon the only other dancers, the Queen doing the same pattern as us. It was an intricate performance between our two pairs, and before

I knew it I was being held parallel to the ground, Dmitri keeping me up in a dip as my wings brushed the ground, causing me to shiver. He smiled sweetly, pulling me up to my feet as a new song began and couples filled the dance floor, leaving us in the center of the usual boring patterns. I was panting, flashes of our dance replaying in my mind. Dmitri stared down at me, his lips parted as if he meant to say something.

Whatever it was, it never got the chance to be said. The twins carefully maneuvered into the center and pulled me away from Dmitri, gushing over how I was suddenly able to dance extremely well. Dmitri was swept to the back of my mind as I was pulled into a group of people I considered friends. Worries were nonexistent as I began to laugh, taking part in the conversations and meeting new Lightbloods, those brave enough to speak with me.

All was well.

Until I bumped into a certain maid, one I had encountered before. The woman had been the maid serving breakfast when I had first eaten with the Queen, and the same maid who had cowered at the sight of me. The second my wing brushed her arm, she screamed, dropping her platter. The drinks stacked on top splattered onto a nearby dancer's pristine creme gown -- red staining the fabric. She shrieked, and the maid was afraid as well. Part of her was afraid of me, and disgusted that she had touched me. The other was fearing for herself as the dancer yanked herself away from her partner and planted herself in front of the servant with eyes that glowed bright white. Musicians grew hesitant, and the music faded away as everyone present turned to stare at us. The trembling maid glanced between my bewildered self and the angered Lightblood, unable to decide which was scarier.

Really? I thought. I'm not the one with glowing eyes right now! I'm not even that threatening!

"You ruined my dress!" The woman shrieked. "This was expensive!"

Terrance and Warren, who were standing just slightly behind me, flinched as the woman began to loom over the tiny maid. Charles, however, looked ready to fight, and so did Rebecca. I held up one hand behind my back, signaling for them to wait.

"Ma'am," I said politely, "she didn't mean to. It was an accident. I startled her."

The woman took one look at me before sneering. "You scare everyone, demon child. This maid should be used to being weak and afraid -- it's no excuse for her to throw wine at me."

I crossed my arms, but knew not to move. Every eye was on me as I stared at the woman, even the wide ones of the maid. It would make my job easier if I could put myself between the maid and the woman, but the second I moved the servant would scream. Rebecca and Charles stayed back, watching me like hawks for another signal. The twins were tense,

though I kept noticing that Terrance would be on the far side of Warren depending on where Rebecca was.

He will never trust Darkbloods.

He met my eyes and flinched. An awkward smile appeared on his face.

Maybe he doesn't trust me.

By now, the emotions swirling within me were enough to fire up my power without any intention. I growled under my breath, my claws and fangs itching for a fight. The dancer glared at me, but was oblivious to my anger as she stepped toward the maid, laying a hand on her shoulder. Her eyes glowed brighter, and I heard the Queen gasp as smoke came from the maid's shoulder. Whatever heat was coming from the woman's hands soon began to burn the maid's skin, and she screamed.

"Enough!" The Queen shouted, but the Lightblood ignored her.

The Queen is a healer, I realized, she doesn't pose a threat to this woman. The guards need to be here.

I am a guard. I fight for these people.

Close enough.

Forgetting however the maid felt, I forced myself in between the two of them, shoving the burnt woman toward my brothers. Charles caught her easily, and knocked her out with his ability. I then faced off against the Lightblood woman, the room holding a stillness to it that I couldn't bare with for much longer.

So this is what my ball has come to?

Fine. You want to ruin this for me?

Not on my watch.

Cursed Blood - 52.Crashing Doubts.52[1,417 words]

Her eyes were painfully bright and I had to fight back the urge to squint at her. The Queen was yelling, her son shouting as well in a way that made it all muddled noise. The volume and sheer pitch of the Queen's voice drove me crazy along with the burning light of my opponent's eyes. I clapped my hands over my ears, panting as my fangs scraped my bottom lip. The taste of copper was rich in my mouth as blood came from the scratch,

painting my mouth red like a true demon's. My wings flapped wildly as I tried to drown out the noise, my brothers calling my name.

"Just... just *shut up already!*"

Along with the boom of my voice, a blast of black smoke came from my wings, the feathers ruffled as what seemed like a magical force began to block out the noise, creating a physical dome over the woman and I. It pushed back the crowd, leaving us in our own fighting ring for everyone to see. Wherever the guards were, I didn't know, but there was no one to solve the situation now. The only way to get rid of the pesky woman would be to send her out of the castle on her ass.

Storm-Cloud?

I'm fine, Kai, I thought, just... an incident occurred. I'm okay. Magic is working for me just fine.

Be careful, Storm-Cloud. There's quite a commotion. Guards are rushing toward the ball, and they're talking about bringing Kyra out as a protection force.

I cursed under my breath. *Thanks, Kai. I'll keep that in mind.*

The woman's lips curled into a smirk. "So you do have some power behind you, hybrid? Not just some fancy mutations."

I growled, licking blood off my lip. "I'm going to throw you out of this castle, lady. This is a *ball*. That maid made a mistake, it's not like she tried to kill you," I snapped, wishing I had brought a weapon with me. My sole focus was getting this over with without ruining the ball for everyone else, but with the transparent dome I had no control over, I knew that it was already over. The dome itself was out of my control - I had no clue what I was doing with it. The texture was nearly that of a bubble, with the black oozing liquid traveling in swirls along the surface.

"You should learn to respect me, peasant. I am one of the Queen's ambassadors, Eileen Sheamus. You are *below* me."

My thoughts flashed back to the assassin, sneaking in to kill the royal family in the middle of the night.

The one I let go, also of my own free will.

Let us weaklings fight our battle.

If that assassin genuinely believed I belonged at the top, then who was this mere Lightblood ambassador to tell me I was below her?

I growled, the dome above us churning. This time, instead of black magic coming from my feathers in the form of swirling gas, the ribbons of magic curled around my fingers and wrists as I gritted my teeth together. My morals were all over the place, my thoughts a jumbled mess. I wanted to kill her -- to have her eat her words, but I also wanted to stay true to who I was.

Who I *thought* I was.

A Lightblood farmer girl with a little extra power; a blessing, maybe. But the itch to prove myself as something better than her was nearly driving me crazier than I already felt, and there was crackling energy in the magic circling my hands. Worried faces peered in from the other side of the dome, but one didn't look worried. One was amazed.

Rebecca was smiling.

I tore my eyes away from her as Eileen rolled her eyes.

"I don't have all day, sweetheart. You should've stayed out of this and played your part of some stupid trophy for the Queen," she spat, eyes flashing dangerously. Their white glow threatened to burn even brighter.

"I am not a trophy," I snarled, lunging for her. For once there was fear on her face, and my sharp claws only barely missed her abdomen. The ambassador sneered, still unaware that I was dangerous.

"Do you really believe that the Queen values the Darkblood you brought here? Do you really think she'll leave her alive?!"

I stopped cold, my heart jumping into my throat. Eileen cackled, the sound like a witch's laugh echoing through the room, even with the slight barrier of the dome.

She pointed at me, her face a sculpture of smugness. "The Queen cares nothing of what you and your Darkblood kin do. She wants to wipe them out, and you will never change that! You are worthless, hybrid, just some toy for her. An *experiment*. That werewolf will never again see the light of day!"

My heart was slowly shattering. A familiar voice, not one of a dragon, but someone else with bright blue eyes, echoed in my head, but I pushed it all away. Even when Kai shouted for me to realize she was lying, I couldn't pay attention.

Because, by now, the doubt was crushing me. Breaking me down until I couldn't figure it out anymore. I looked back at where Rebecca had been with my brothers and saw she was gone already, but whether or not she'd been taken was unknown. I flew at the dome, pounding on the unbreakable surface I'd formed with my own magic. I shouted through it, pointing to where Rebecca had been. Charles gasped, and I heard him yell her name. The twins and him soon left, my father worriedly glancing back at me.

"Go find her..," I whispered weakly, but somehow he heard it. They all left, pushing through the crowd of stunned Lightbloods to find my friend.

Said Lightbloods watched like I was an animal in a zoo as I turned to face the ambassador, looking over her shoulder into the eyes of the Queen. Amara's eyes shone with moisture, but I refused to believe they were tears of sadness for me. Instead, I suspected them to be tears of guilt. My voice of reason was gone, and I wished more than anything that I could get rid of the ache in my chest as I eventually met Eileen's eyes.

"They won't save you now," I shrugged, my voice sounding broken as a weak, sad smile appearing on my face. I had lost it.

Eileen smirked as I lunged for her, but the expression dissolved into fear almost instantly. My wings flared at my sides, taking me into the air as I drew back a hand, my claws pressed together like a dagger. The swirling magic crackled with dark *and* light energy, the two enveloping my hand as I flew toward Eileen. She gasped, throwing up her hands. A blast of telepathic force shook everything in the room -- but me. Her weak blast did nothing to stop me as I landed on her, holding back from using my claws just yet. The kick I executed instead sent her flying back into the churning surface of the dome, and she screamed. The surface itself was burning her, the magic reacting to my emotions. Eileen screamed, scrambling away from the dome as I realized I had one giant weapon all around us.

"And you thought I was below you..," I mused, stomping over to the woman in a burnt, stained gown. She staggered to her feet, fist flying toward me in a sloppy motion. I deflected it easily, batting her aside with inhuman strength. What was meant to be a simple block turned into her flying sideways into the dome, her screams causing my frustration to increase at all the noise. I shook out my hand with the crackling energy, relaxing what I could of my magic. She wasn't worth this energy.

I began striding toward her, but stopped short when I caught a whisper in the crowd and saw them turning toward the doors to the ballroom.

"...werewolf, she's bleeding..."

"...looks bad... think it's permanent..."

Rebecca, I thought, throwing caution to the wind. I ran for the dome, nearly tripping over my skirt. Gritting my teeth, I leapt into the air and soared toward the edge, fist first. My knuckles connected with the barrier and it shattered, dissolving in a *poof* of hot magic. Only one or two Lightbloods were brave enough to help Eileen up as I landed on the banister, gasping. My brothers and father were supporting a bleeding Rebecca, Terrance and Warren holding three men at their feet.

Cursed Blood - 53.White Magic.53[1,450 words]

I jumped off the banister, fangs vanishing from my mouth. The twins dropped their three men on their faces, their groans breaking the heavy silence. Charles and my father gently set Rebecca down, laying her down on the floor as I knelt.

"What happened?"

"They had her," Warren panted, "they were outside the castle, trying to get some sort of information out of her."

Rebecca wheezed, her eyes fluttering open and shut. I squeezed her hand, ignoring the whispers below and Eileen's wails of pain. "Tell me what happened," I told Rebecca, spotting a dark shine in the werewolf's eyes. She looked ready to shift and fight back like a wounded animal, but was clutching onto her control for dear life. We gave her a minute to catch her breath, some of her shallow wounds beginning to close slowly with her werewolf super healing. Rebecca eventually relaxed a bit, meeting my eyes with a hateful stare, though I knew the hate was not for me.

"They dragged me away. That woman gave them a signal right before she got into your head. Even if I made enough noise to get some attention, those Lightbloods wouldn't save me and the noise wasn't loud enough to get through your magic."

Warren looked ashamed, while Terrance's face was expressionless. Charles looked like he was ready to vomit from the guilt.

"We didn't even notice..," Charles muttered, his eyes sad as he glanced at me. Surely, he was expecting me to be angry with them. Gently, I reached up and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, carefully hugging him without ruffling my perfectly fine dress.

"You did your best," I reassured him, "and you found her. Not only that, but Eileen was easy to deal with. Now I just..."

I trailed off, staring at the floor below us. Terrance, giving off the same big brother vibes he'd always had, patted my shoulder.

"We'll figure this out, Cloud. We have to, after all," he said with a smile, and I found my own nerves easing up. The naive side of me was completely fine with the solution being so simple -- find Rebecca, let her wounds heal with her abilities.

Until her eyes rolled to the back of her head and she slumped over. I shoved my father out of the way with a quick apology as I began to slap Rebecca's cheek, trying to wake her up. When nothing happened, I began looking over her for injuries and noticed something off

in her dress. Hidden in layers of her skirt, right above her hip, was a deep slash that was still bleeding.

"She needs to be healed. We need the Queen," I said in panic, trying to get to my feet. Charles stopped me, already on his own.

"I'll get her. See what you can do, Cloud," he said, kissing my temple before running down the steps. I ripped a shred of tulle off my skirt and applied pressure to her bleeding wound, feeling the material dampen under my fingers. The twins and my father were pale, unsure of what to do. In my distress, crackling energy had reappeared around my hands, changing from white to black as I went back and forth from focusing on waking Rebecca to focusing on trying to keep pressure on her hip.

Damn it, where are you Charles? I thought, watching two guards carry Eileen up the stairs. They cast me wary glances as they brushed by, and the sound of heavy footsteps drifted toward us -- more guards on their way. My hands were shaking as I remembered Eileen's words, and not only that, but I attacked and harmed one of the Queen's ambassadors. There was a good chance I would end up back in a cell.

I bit my lip, ignoring the crowd just at the bottom of stairs as I looked down at my Darkblood friend. She had gone pale, and her shoulders shuddered with each breath she took.

Kai, I thought, reaching out with my mind. The worried feelings of the dragon intruded on my own as I allowed him into my mind. Rebecca is hurt. Do you remember when you tried to contact a spirit for me?

The dragon's concern changed to confusion. *Yes? But what does it have to do with the werewolf girl?*

I used something like my brother's power to replenish your energy, do you think I can replicate the Queen's?

Kai frowned, and I only knew that because the mental image passed through our bond. I nearly smiled, but it disappeared as Rebecca whimpered. The magic swirls around my fingers brought me back to the subject at hand, my eyes resting on the different flashes of black and white. I heard Charles' voice above all else, and the Prince arguing.

Someone touched my shoulder and I jumped to my feet, wings flaring out and nearly knocking over the twins. Dmitri grabbed my arm, holding me still as we glared at each other.

"I'm here to help, Cloud. Put your claws away."

I took the words literally and figuratively, my nails eventually shrinking as I calmed myself down. He nodded his thanks, eyes on Rebecca who was beginning to writhe in pain.

"Do you have any healing magic?" I asked him, my voice filled with hope.

Dmitri shook his head. "No, I don't..," he trailed off, glancing down at my fingers. They were half hidden by swirling magic, clear for both of us to see. "But maybe you do."

He sighed, pulling me down next to Rebecca. "Lightblood magic isn't just about supposedly being divine while Darkbloods are demonic. Lightblood sorcerers tend to have magic that gathers in lighter colours, while Darkbloods tend to, well, have shadowy magic. Those spots in those swirls mean things -- black for Darkblood energy, white for Lightblood energy."

The specialist rubbed his hands over his face before gently reaching to where a scrap of my skirt was stuck onto Rebecca's bloodied skin. He applied pressure to it before glancing over at me. "In theory, the whole thing with Darkbloods having offensive magic and Lightbloods having support abilities is almost the truth. So, if I'm correct, you should be able to use that white magic to heal her. Unless you *do* have a limit on your abilities, but no one knows the extent of your blood's power."

I nodded, processing his words quickly in my still slightly panicked state. "Alright, got it. So what do I do?" I asked, wringing my hands together. The swirls crackled against each other, the feathers of my wings ruffling along with them.

"Calm down. Focus on your Lightblood. Then, it may all be instinct," Dmitri shrugged, keeping his hands on her wound. "I'll try to do what I can with first aid, but it's up to you. The Lightbloods are rather aggressively trying to prevent Her Majesty from helping."

I frowned, trying not to rage at the innocents down below. *Maybe they're just scared and antsy*, I convinced myself, shaking out my hands. With an exhale, I focused on the white magic; my Lightblood. The warmer of the two, safety and comfort. The memory of being a baby, almost dead, saved by the guards came to mind as I focused on finding an ounce of power I could use to heal.

Warmth. My own crying, the pain. Voices.

A soft, warm touch that was more than physical. Pulling at my soul, fixing it as well as my own body. Relief.

"That's it," Dmitri whispered. My eyes had fallen shut, and I cracked one eye open to see a soft white glow coming from my fingers. It was warm, and brought a sense of safety with it as I laid one hand on Rebecca's forehead and another over Dmitri's hands on her hip. I began to picture the touch, the one that went deeper than the surface of the body. One that gave enough power to heal without question.

Dmitri briefly muttered a wow under his breath, and I heard my father suck in a breath. Gradually, Rebecca's wheezing in pain faded away, and I could even feel her body repairing itself while feeding off my energy. Once I had the confidence, I opened my eyes to watch her bruises fade, and marvelled at my own power. When the light disappeared from my hands, I ripped a clean strip of tulle and brushed away the one that was soaked, mopping up the leftover blood. Instead of a deep wound, there was a barely noticable scar.

"I'm never doing this again," a certain golden-eyed girl groaned. Rebecca placed her hand on her forehead, reaching out with the other. Dmitri helped her up into sitting, making sure she was stable before looking over at me.

"Looks like there's quite a lot to discover about you, Cloud..."

Cursed Blood - 54.Humiliation and Protection.54[1,464 words]

It wasn't long until whatever luck holding back the Lightblood guards was gone. Dmitri supported Rebecca and even my brothers and father backed off as several citizens came in with some familiar guards I'd seen on the training grounds. The Prince was among them as well, though he looked upset about it. I gulped, getting to my feet as my form slid away for my own protection to seem less threatening. My gown was still intact beside a few torn layers of skirt, and I faced the guards with confidence. Below, servants were cleaning the ballroom and clearing away food as Lightbloods looked on in hunger, anticipating my punishment. Charles was among them, standing near the Queen as she looked on with a clouded expression, surrounded by her advisors. Shade, Andrew and Travis were next to my brother -- though I didn't think they knew each other -- staring back at me in worry.

I wish you were here, I thought to Kai, wringing my hands together. Janora and Raeni were below as well, the seamstress shooting me a supportive thumbs-up.

Not only that, but I swore I saw a red eyed man in the background.

"Miss Rose," a tall guard next to the Prince said, "its required that you come with us."

I sighed. "Can I at least make sure she's alright?"

His expression darkened. I could practically read his thoughts loud and clear; *what is some freak doing asking for extra freedom?*

"Please watch out for her," I whispered, not turning my face to look at Dmitri. Gulping, I stepped toward the guard only to be jostled back by another yanking my arms behind my back. The guard who had spoken, who I now assumed to be a general, led the group back down the steps, the Prince trailing behind him without a word. Whoever was holding my arms back pressed my wrists together, inflicting pain not only on them but my shoulders as well. It was hard not to lash out at them, but I managed to remain calm as the guards strode through the Lightbloods, stopping before their Queen and her advisors. My wrists were released and I rolled out my shoulders, trying to get rid of the tension I felt not only in myself but in the air. I had spent energy on healing Rebecca and was a bit less antsy, but now I was filled with worry.

The tall guard, whom I suspected to be the General, bowed to the Queen.

"What would you like us to do with Miss Rose, Your Majesty?"

I lifted a brow. *They dragged me away from healing a friend just to ask what they should do?*

Assholes, I decided, subtly nodding to myself as I met the Queen's eyes. The woman who seemed to be the center of my problems lately -- if I wasn't loyal to her, pledged and bound by word, I probably would've had an easier time making decisions about who to trust. While it was true, my vow to her was making things a little tricky, it also wasn't her fault.

I made the choice. It was mine.

Queen Amara glanced at her son before looking back at me, her eyes sweeping over my dress and up to my hair, which was untouched despite horns being on my head not too long ago.

"What happened, Cloud? Why did you step in for that maid?"

I swallowed my fear, confident that I did the right thing. Confident that I would do it again if I could.

"My wings brushed the woman's arm. It was the same maid from that breakfast. I scared her, so she dropped her platter and splashed wine on your ambassador's dress. Ms. Sheamus was angry and was hurting the maid, so I stepped in. After all, I am practically a guard. I lost control for a moment because my senses were overwhelmed and that's where the dome came from. It was a mistake. I didn't know it would burn the ambassador."

My mouth went dry the second I was finished my words, my nerves still on edge.

"She has to be punished for harming a noblewoman, Your Majesty. Ms. Rose *is* still a peasant," the general butted in, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment. In that moment, I decided I hated being called a peasant. I was a fighter, not some farm girl. Not anymore.

Instead of being on the sidelines watching my brothers argue incessantly with each other, I wanted to be the warrior rushing in to win wars.

I clenched my jaw, tilting my chin up. "With all due respect, sir, I am one of the Queen's privately hired warriors. I was protecting one of her servants. The ambassador wished to harm some girl over a dress she could probably buy ten more of."

Eyebrows were being raised all around me, a whisper travelling through the crowd. I could see the rage on the General's face, but refused to flinch when he stomped toward me, hand lifted. I stayed stable even as my head whipped to one side from the force of his hit. The pain vanished almost instantly, and my gums began to throb, fangs wanting to be free and to get revenge for him laying a finger on me.

I exhaled, relaxing in my place and meeting his angered eyes. It was time for the old, powerless Cloud who used her words to resolve things to come out. Magic and overwhelming power wouldn't be much help now.

The General looked livid as I stared at him without fear.

"I'm not lying," I shrugged, "I have signed my entire life off to Her Majesty. I have the ability to make a call to save a servant."

Queen Amara and Prince Elijah said nothing, simply watching. The guard lifted his hand once again, and I kept myself from lifting my fists against him as he swung his palm for my cheek. I didn't, however, hesitate to step back out of the way. The other guards tensed, some of them even drawing their blades as I once again froze in my place.

Cloud, please stop this, the Prince's voice popped into my head. *You'll only make this worse.*

I met his eyes from where he stood next to his mother, sighing. It was late, and the failure that was this ball had taken away all my energy. I still desperately wanted to curl up into a ball and sob away my worries, but now I was in the middle of a room of Lightbloods with a man dead set on causing me pain.

"Are you saying I should be sitting here and taking this?" I said, my voice sharp like the cracking of a whip as I addressed the Prince, ignoring everyone else. He winced, grimacing as many people followed my gaze to him. Now their stares bored into his body, and he shot a sheepish smile to his mother.

She nudged him and he straightened up, swallowing his embarrassment.

"Cloud, you need to be punished. Accept a few smacks and get it over with," he ordered, as if it didn't sound like a barbaric way to treat someone who was just trying to protect another. Two others, really.

This is what I get for being a force of protection. Punishment and pain.

I glared at the Prince, too angry to express myself. Instead, the temptation to give the General a few smacks nearly sent me into a fit of rage. He strode toward me, confident that I would submit after receiving an order from His Highness.

This is humiliation. He really believes I would just give up like that.

I rolled out my neck, leaving my eyes trained on the ground. Weighing the options, counting his steps toward me.

More violence will lead to further punishment. I can't push my luck too far.

They clearly don't need me in tip-top shape if they're willing to let me get thrown around a bit without a word in my defense.

I hate this, I thought, feeling the General's breath on the top of my head. I was frozen, unable to take control of myself as a conflict went on inside my head. The pain barely even registered when his fist met with my gut, causing me to double over in pain that only lasted a split second. My power was alive beneath my skin, trying to break free.

But I couldn't let it.

Tears ran down my cheeks here and there as the sound of fist hitting solid human girl echoed through the room, broken only by the sharp inhales of horrified Lightbloods. I took every blow, feeling my body repair itself almost instantly. Still, I couldn't stand it, and began to sink to the floor as the General began to pant. The tear streaks on my face were the clearest symbol for them all.

The symbol of my humiliation.

Cursed Blood - 55.One Week Later.55[1,578 words]

I hadn't spoken to any of them.

A week ago, the night of the Ball of Demons - I couldn't help but think of it as that -- I had been punished for protecting a friend and a servant of the Queen. It had made my mental conflict worse, and I wanted desperately to flee Mythira and never look back. However, I was still bound to the Queen and loyal to her desperate my own personal civil war in my head. No matter who I was or what I wanted, I had vowed to serve her. Now I was stuck in the castle surrounded by people I would never trust and nearly despised. Ever since the ridiculous punishment I'd been given, I had holed up in my room. It had been a week since I'd left the room, instead choosing to curl up in my bed and stare out the window while

talking telepathically to Kai. He was practically *my* dragon, no questions asked. He and my brothers and father were the only ones I'd spoken to, my brothers being the ones to bring me food. They didn't try convincing me to leave the room, but assured me that Rebecca had gotten home safely. That relieved me of some of my anger, at least.

Now all that was leftover was confusion and resentment for myself and Lightbloods, who were the people I'd grown up with.

It was sunrise at the moment, and I felt like I was covered in grime. After washing up and braiding back my hair, who's waves had gotten longer, I slipped on a simple dress. It was full blown summer now, with warm air blowing in from the open window. I had many things to do -- I had even listed them, but there was still a pit in my stomach when I thought of facing any of the Lightbloods in the castle or in the Valley. None of the blows dealt to me had left a mark; my Darkblood healing abilities had made sure of that. But the pain of betrayal and shame still ran deep, and I couldn't get over it.

With a sigh, I began tidying the room liked I'd done every morning for the past six days. It never really got dirty or messy beside a few burnt spots, courtesy of Kai, but it was soothing to do something daily. It felt normal, like working on the farm had been.

My heart yearned for my old life back. I wanted to curl up and cry, but I had been doing that for a while. Hell, it had even made me feel lighter after my first day of sobbing.

I shook my head at my own thoughts, glancing at the dragon in the corner of the room. He always laid in front of the door, preventing any intruders from breaking through there without him knowing. I smiled at his concern for my safety, shaking out my blanket before remaking my bed.

Conveniently, the second I finished cleaning, there was a knock on my door. Kai woke instantly, looking at me for confirmation before doing anything.

Can you smell them?

...Yes...

I frowned at his hesitant response. *Who is it, Kai?*

The dragon refused to meet my eyes. *The Prince, Storm-Cloud.*

My expression hardened. I crossed my arms, trying not to explode in panic. I didn't want to see him, but I knew I had to face the world eventually.

My entire life was sold off to the Queen. I couldn't hide forever.

Let him in.

Kai, rather surprised, scooted over so that I could approach the door. I pried it open, trying not to glare at the blond Prince on the other side. He took one look at my face and winced, wringing his hands together.

"Can we talk? Just us?"

I leaned against the doorframe. "Go ahead."

Elijah rubbed his hands over his face, his guilt obvious. "I wanted to take you out for brunch, please. You don't have to do anything but come with me."

I opened my mouth to protest, but forced the words to stop. *Time to get back on the horse*, I thought to myself, *and this is a great way to throw myself into the fire once again*.

"Fine," I sighed, "how are we getting there?"

Elijah winked, which only made me roll my eyes. "By flight. Kyra is saddled up outside."

Kyra. The big red dragon that disliked me and didn't trust me at all.

Great.

Another thought hit me. *I have wings of my own.*

Then, the image of people staring me down as I stood in front of them with black wings sprouting from my back popped into my head. Their expressions -- filled with hatred and fear. None of them defended me, barely any of them approached me if they didn't have to.

My eyes threatened to water and I looked down at my feet. The ball had done the opposite of what it was supposed to, since instead of normalizing having a Darkblood or two around, it had only made me ashamed of my power and hate everything around me.

I rubbed my eyes, clearing them of tears. I had already cried plenty, it was time to get things done.

Elijah was watching me the entire time, a sad look in his eyes. His pity made my blood boil and I found a shred of confidence. *I'm going with him for brunch*, I repeated to Kai as I slipped out the door, closing it lightly as the dragon's snores filled the silence. I smiled to myself, taking a shred of happiness from the familiar rhythm of heavy dragon breath. My mood was surprisingly cheery as I fell in step beside the Prince, looking around the hallway. Certain things seemed different; moved, redone, added in or removed. The maids must've been hard at work doing some extra decorating, which was ironic because I had spent some time customizing my room with things I'd bought when I left the castle with Janora's help. Now, it was more my style.

I frowned. That day, I had fought that 'boss' man. The one terrorizing innocents that the guards wouldn't save because they didn't want to harm any leftover powerful Lightbloods.

People like that... They need me.

Wait, what am I thinking?!

These people hate me!

I stopped short, forgetting all about the Prince. My eyes were wide as I stared at a new painting on the wall. It wasn't particularly significant, but the woman in the painting caught my eye nonetheless. The bottom half had a background of calm, light blue colours in splashes all around. The top half, however, had bold streaks of reds, especially darker shades. The woman was dressed in white, but her hair and eyes were as black as could be, as if they were made of shadows. Her skin was golden, like she was made of fake flesh. Not only that, but even though she was twisted away and there were others in the painting layered over top, I could see feathers near her body, arranged in a wing's pattern.

But there was more to it than that.

She looked absolutely and utterly...

Terrified.

The exact middle of her body was positioned in the center of it, so that half of her was in the blue, and half in the red. One hand reached for those in the red, muscled, gorgeous beings with the same flawless skin in various shades. They all had different abnormal eye colours that burned brightly, like Eileen's. They wielded glowing weapons as well, with magic hovering in the air around them. It was clear that they were powerful -- some would even say that they looked like someone who was the most powerful of all time. Like gods.

The bottom half was different. They had weapons of intricate design, with things like fire coating the blades or shields of pure magic. There was more of a range of magic depicted in their half of the painting, with a large range of styles. A rope led from the pile of people to the black haired woman's ankle, tying her to their half. Now that I looked closer, I could see that there was a thin string tied around the woman's wrist as well, one that drew blood as it cut through her skin, tied too tightly. It ended up going to the top of the painting, keeping her locked in place between the two sides.

There was probably more for me to see, maybe something that would make it all less confusing for me, but I was distracted when I saw one of the men in the top half.

Red eyes, ones that were all too familiar.

"Cloud?"

I flinched, turning to the Prince. He looked concerned, glancing between me and the painting.

"Does it bother you?" He questioned, running a hand through his hair. "Even my mother wants it removed. It was in a storage room somewhere, something like that, and one of the maids randomly hung it up. That's what I was *told*, at least. Either way, we can--"

"Can I have it?"

Elijah raised his eyebrows. "You want that thing?"

I didn't question myself on this. Something was important about that painting.

I nodded, and he shrugged.

"I don't see why not," Elijah finally admitted. "We can ask a maid to leave it in your room on our way out. If Kai lets them in."

I smiled, though it was only small, and caught up to him. His small talk became background noise as I focused on the prospect of getting my hands on the painting.

I have a good hunch about this...

Cursed Blood - Intermission! [1,097 words]

Hey guys, this chapter is just me to you for now.

So, as far as I'm concerned, the first sort of *arc* of the story just came to an end. It was long, I know, but please keep in mind that I was originally going to write a series for this until I realized that the series system wasn't working quite that well. So, it'll all be one giant book.

But, basically, we are now at the end of part one. I will definitely be getting the next few chapters out in no time, since I am just as pumped as anyone else to get going on more of Cursed Blood, but I wanted to put a small pause on it for a bit. After all, we've had 55 straight chapters of this :)

So, two things!

1 - I may be changing up my uploading schedule. I will still be trying to keep up with updating on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, but it may not be *only* Cursed Blood. Starting now, I will be choosing another book I've been working on to become a published work in progress (though I'm not sure which one I'm going with, whoops). Each uploading

day it will be a toss up between which one gets an update -- though Cursed Blood will probably be my main pick every time.

Edit from the future: the choosen book is called the Shifters: Katrina. It's the first of many all about shapeshifters. Please show support for that if you are interested <3

2 - I want to give some updates on the plot so far. Which by that I mean I wanted to go over some of the characters... just to make this break chapter a little longer, to be honest. So if you aren't interested in a character recap, skip on ahead :)

Queen Amara of Mythira

Queen Amara is an unmarried widow with a single child; Crown Prince Elijah of Mythira.

She is a full Lightblood healer, and saved Cloud's life when she was a baby. That was also when she decided to declare war on the Darkbloods and fight back.

Queen Amara is in her late fifties.

Her hair is black with, of course, some white/silver strands and she has green eyes. Her magic can be used to heal herself and make her look less her age.

Unknown what her true plan for Cloud is, but she currently controls her as Cloud signed a contract and pledged herself to be the Queen's servant.

Will protect her son at all costs.

Throws fits over broken glass.

Crown Prince Elijah of Mythira

Blondie with blue eyes. Notably attractive - according to Cloud ;)

Has the ability to detect a person's power and use it against them, which is considered a curse. Only person immune is Cloud.

Fond over his two pet dragons; Kai and Kyra.

Has three favourite warriors; Travis, Andrew and Shade. They constantly work as his body guards.

Doesn't know his father, but loves his mother dearly.

The Rose Brothers

Terrance, Warren and Charles. Terrance and Warren are twins with pale skin, freckles and light, honey eyes. Charles is tan, with hazel eyes and a leaner body. He closely resembles Cloud. All four Rose children have the same thick brown hair.

The twins are the eldest of the four, with Charles right behind them.

Terrance can read people's emotions, and occasionally the thoughts of the weak-minded.

Warren can speak in other people's minds but cannot receive a response, even from Darkbloods.

Charles has the ability to give or take energy from whoever.

All three brothers are single, though the twins were crushing on the same girl at the beginning of the story.

The three brothers are also going to be knights for the Queen, starting their training in the fall to come.

Charles is accepting of Cloud's state, so are Terrance and Warren, however, Terrance has an extreme distrust for everyone in the Darkblood camp that Cloud has come to see as friends.

Rebecca

No last name given. Orphaned at seven, lived among Lightbloods for many years faking her personality. Lost control about four years later, got found out, and was imprisoned for years. Unknown as to how she escaped, but was surely rescued by Sven and the other Darkbloods.

Golden eyes and hair. Skin littered with black tattoos that hide scars from years of torture.

Full blooded werewolf. Good killer and tracker. Uneasy around Lightbloods -- determined to kill the last of the hunters who killed her parents.

Friends with everyone in the camp, and has a particular liking for Charles. Also feels guilty for hurting Terrance.

Storm-Cloud Katlyn Rose

Born Lightblood *and* Darkblood. The two bloods were going to clash and kill her when a Darkblood assassin kidnapped her as a baby. They administered a dose of Darkblood to her which set off a reaction that saved her from her own DNA.

Looks are similar to Charles': tanned skin, hazel eyes, thick brown hair and lean muscle body structure.

Unsure of her loyalties. Wary of her brothers at times. Broken ties with her mother. Specific fondness for a certain one-winged dragon.

Led by curiosity and her will to discover what her own power is doing to her. Will never back down once she's knee-deep in a fight.

Immune to all spells, poisons and etcetera because of her Lightblood gift. Extent of her Darkblood side is unknown, but she has a form with wings, claws, fangs, horns and a tail. Magic itself takes form in black smoke, occasionally filled with energy.

Destiny and purpose uncertain, but she has a clear mission of retrieving what information she needs to go back to her home and speak to Spirit, who is the ghost of a woman who almost became a *Cursedblood*.

The purpose of her name, Storm-Cloud, has not been revealed, but it has a similarity to the name of her favourite dragon's sister.

Known for her "demon" looks and power, which is overwhelming if another person even has the capabilities to sense it. Can be so overbearing it's painful for certain Lightbloods.

Possibly the center of the affections of more than one handsome warrior ;)

Ha, I'm leaving that there. Just some tidbits about the characters. Anyway, into the next arc we go!

Another edit from the future (right before publishing). This and chapters 52-55 were all published June 8th, 2019. I apologize for the spam, but I wanted to get the ending of this part out as soon as possible. I will be publishing more of Katrina's story for the next while so that I can build up some chapters for this story.

Thank you & I hope you enjoyed. Remember to leave comments, reviews and hearts :)

Cursed Blood - 56.Back in the Life.56[1,118 words]

I leaned back in my chair, resting my hands on my stomach, which was surely bloated by now. Forgetting about being formal, the Prince mirrored my position, pastry crumbs stuck to his fingers as he patted his stomach as well. We had already gotten through our brunch, and it had taken us much longer than expected since we had both ordered a ridiculous amount.

Maybe I'm not the only one who's been down in the dumps not eating much, I thought, my friendship feelings for the Prince coming to light before I shut down again. My mouth felt dry and chalky as I looked out the window of the small shop. It was the one I'd visited before, but the old man wasn't here today. I could see down the road to the fountain where I'd fought with the 'boss' and smiled at the memory. Me just being a heroic nobody, a simple fight bringing me so much satisfaction.

"Cloud," Elijah said, fiddling with a pastry that had come out of nowhere, "we should probably talk about things. You've been holed up for a while."

I leaned my head back, contemplating the ceiling. I could still hear the sound of a fist striking my body as I did nothing, since that was the safest thing *to do*. The royals did nothing to stop it. With my power constantly healing me, they saw no reason to. They just let their General punish me as he saw fit for defending a servant, the man eventually letting up when he exhausted himself and his anger. He pulled away from me as I laid in a ball and spat on my face, muttering words about my lucky break with such power and magic. He then stormed away, and my brothers rushed to save me from hard Lightblood stares.

All I had felt was betrayal and hatred. I hadn't left my room the entire week, and I busied myself with regular indoor Lightblood chores. It was a numbing experience, one that brainwashed me into forgetting all about what they'd done.

Yet being numb didn't help my subconscious. I didn't trust them anymore, and I didn't trust the Darkbloods either. The entire time, Terrance had had a strange look in his eyes, which worsened when he was close to Rebecca. His words about them still being dangerous had been replaying in my mind the entire weekend, and I realized that they for sure would always be treating me different. After all, to them, I was some sacred, special being.

To the people I grew up with, however, I was a filthy hybrid.

It would be so easy to run, I thought, my eyes unfocused as I lost myself in my head, *those weaklings would never catch me. That assassin has a point -- I could leave and never look back. Let them fight this war until they all end up dead.*

The corner of my mouth quirked up. *I love too many of them for that, now don't I.*

Scornfully, I pictured the Darkbloods and Lightbloods of Mythira. *Rebecca, Zen, the deaf twins, Sven, Kai.* I nearly growled at the betrayal the simple thought of Lightbloods hit me with. *My brothers and father. Elijah. Amara. Janora and Raeni, and the other elite warriors. Travis, Shade, Andrew. The rest of those assholes.*

With a sigh, I looked down my nose at the Prince. His blond hair was swept back as if he'd been ruffling it, and I could see traces of his eyes being bloodshot. He was staring at his hands, on edge from my silence.

"If it was up to me," I eventually began, my voice hard and merciless, "I would be far, far away from Mythira. But my family lives in that castle, among those people who stood by and watched. Alongside *you*, who they worship as their Prince. You who decided that it was better for me to take a beating instead of defending myself. Since it was of course natural for me to be punished for saving someone from a batshit crazy woman."

He slumped into his seat, silent as if I'd stolen his vocal cords. I growled loudly, angry that he couldn't even defend himself. Power swirled in my veins as I got to my feet, beginning to walk away.

"Cloud, please," Elijah blurted, but out of the corner of my eye, I knew he remained seated.

Not even worth standing, Princeling?

"No, Your *Highness*," I spat, "just leave me be."

I looked over my shoulder, barely keeping my wings inside. "I'll serve your mother like I'm meant to, but I won't be happy doing it. I'll do every mission and nothing more, except for what I want. Which includes finding out what I am, without you.

"Because it's not like anyone has been honest with me," I finished, thinking of all the people who had told me stories of what a Cursedblood was, or given me vague hints of what *I* was meant to be. Even those who were trying to lead me to the answers -- they made me frustrated. *They could just... Tell me! Is that so hard to ask?* I wondered, turning away from the Prince. Others had begun to recognize him and stared at me as if I was a heathen, disrespecting their Prince without a care. I strode toward the door, leaving him in his seat with a frown.

Outside, I paused to bask in the sunlight. It was almost the afternoon, and despite my anger, going out had pushed me closer to my normal self. There were no more chores for me to do holed up in my room, I was back and ready to get some real work done - for myself.

The scholars I met at the ball, they can help me. I just have to find them first and convince them.

I started walking, brushing past several Lightbloods. For once I felt normal, walking down the street in a simple dress with my hair sticking to my neck in sweat as I remained deep in thought. No one stared, no one was there to judge. It was like I'd traveled back to when I was just a girl being raised on a farm with her rowdy brothers and loving parents. Before we'd been attacked and my mother turned on me. Before my brother had been taken and I had become something more than a girl happy to take over some farmland.

If only, I thought with a wry smile, stopping at the base of Mythic Mountain. More than half of my consciousness was telling me to turn back and run, but the little rationality I had left took over and I began walking, ever so slowly, up the path.

Straight to into the source of my misery.

Cursed Blood - 57.Re-appearing.57[1,241 words]

I wasn't as miserable as I orginially thought.

Once inside the castle, I avoided every Lightblood I could, mostly using my sharp senses and pain detection to sneak by. My hazardous path eventually took me to the library, where I dove into every book that had a useful seeming title. At the moment, I was tucked in between two shelves with my knees up to my chest, a dusty book resting on top of them. Its writing was smudged and the grammar itself was of an older time. Right language, though.

Heaving a sigh, I rested my head back. Words were swimming in front of my eyes. So far, I'd only learned about Lightblood magic. Healing wasn't too uncommon, but the dome seemed to be a tad abnormal. The strange, almost non-existent limits on my power were something I wasn't too surprised about when I read that Lightbloods almost always hit their limit during training after a while. It was usually clear to a person, like a rock sinking to the bottom of a lake when they neared the limit of their power's capabilities.

Not for me.

Not yet.

Unable to stand the stuffy library much longer, I grabbed as many books as I could from the pile of relevant ones I'd found and hauled them back to my room. Carefully stacking them on an empty shelf, I yawned and rubbed at my eyes. There was leftover frustration swirling around my mind. The Prince's half assed apology was a taunting memory, along with the hazy faces of everyone at the ball. After all, the only people I could trust were my family, Rebecca, and Dmitri. I didn't know where everyone else had been, and therefore didn't know if they *chose* not to help. Dmitri had been watching Rebecca for me, and my brothers had been stuck in the crowd. My father was also with Rebecca.

All my other Lightblood friends, though. They hadn't given me any *excuses*.

Stop, I told myself, *this isn't the time to start hating everyone. You've done enough of this.*

Slowly gathering myself, pulling my thoughts out of the dark place they'd gone, I managed to force myself to leave the room. Other than researching myself, I also had training to do.

Probably some sort of chores for the Queen as well, but I think I'd lose it if she or her son tried to order me around so soon.

My footsteps were dead quiet on the carpet floor as I walked down the hall, strolling in no particular direction. I was half heartedly searching for someone to teach me something, or at least spar with.

"Holy sh--Cloud?!"

Slowing, I craned my neck to look over my shoulder. Warren and Charles were wide-eyed, staring at me like I'd sprouted *more* horns.

They haven't seen me out of my room in... a week, exactly.

I shot them a quirky smile. "Hi, guys."

Charles held a goofy look on his face, as if he'd just seen the gods faceplant directly in front of him. "Imposter!" My brother exclaimed, running over to me. His hands began to poke at my cheeks like a child. "Who are you?"

Swatting him away, I rolled my eyes. "It's me. The lovely Princeling dragged me out of my room today, so I figured it was time to get some things done."

"Like what?" Warren questioned, strolling over to where Charles and I were, my other brother still marvelling at the fact that I left my room.

Like reading books until I go cross eyed so I can finally explain my existence.

"Training," I answered, it being only a partial lie.

"Cloud," Warren blurted suddenly, "maybe you should rest longer. The ball was definitely... a shit show."

I couldn't help but scowl. "I have Darkblood healing, Warren. I'm fine."

He looked uncomfortable, throwing a worried look to Charles.

"What is it?" I asked, looking between the two of them.

Charles shrugged, his lips turned down into a frown. "We've all been thinking that maybe this castle isn't a good place for you," he admitted, holding my stare confidently. Warren looked away, shame colouring his cheeks pink. From the look of it, I expected that the entire Rose family wanted to get me out of here.

My heart broke for them. This had felt like a dream with my brothers being here to become knights and my father free from tedious farmwork, but I became an obstacle for them.

They're just trying to protect me, I reminded myself, stop feeling guilty. Get yourself together.

"I'm okay, guys," I insisted. "Really. Thank you, though."

They both grimaced, their faces haggard for a split moment. Part of me wanted to reach out to them, to spend time with them so that we could all relax, but they were too worried for me. I shot them the widest smile I could manage, and saved the talking for when we could do it without them worrying so much.

"I'm going to go visit Rebecca," I lied, slipping around the corner before they could say anything. Sadness lingered in Charles' eyes as I left, Warren's face as expressionless as ever. Ignoring the guilt that came with leaving them, I forced myself to walk back to the library, and lost myself within the shelves of books. Looking for nothing in particular, I began to browse.

By the time night rolled around, I was frustrated. Impulsive actions came to mind and I shot out of my seat at one of the desks, headed for the library doors. When no one was around, I slipped out of the castle, sprouting wings as I ran toward the edge of the mountain. The rush of blood pounded in my ears as I leapt off, catch the breeze and soaring downward toward the farm.

The lights were on inside when I landed in the field, staring at the shadows of moving people.

Someone moved in, I realized, my eyes widening. I had come to speak with Spirit, but what if their entrance had forced her out?

"Well if it isn't the Gray One," a voice whispered. My head whipped to the side, eyes landing on Spirit as she leaned against the wall of my home.

"You're still here?"

She laughed. "Well, yeah. I'm tied to this place. I cannot leave until my work here is done."

My head tilted to one side as I considered her words. "You're stuck?"

She nodded. "I'm stuck until either you or the gods themselves free me so that I can move on," Spirit shrugged, walking my way. Her eyes flicked back to the kitchen window, where a light was still on. "You're going to be seen if we stay in this moment, give me just a second."

I did as she said, remaining quiet as her hands jerked unnaturally. Finally, the world went silent, and the sky above us became all sorts of colours, stars and even planets clear. It was like I was staring right into space, as if our atmosphere had disappeared.

It took my breath away, to say the least. If some spirit of a human woman related to the gods could create something like this, then I was dying to see actual gods in action.

"Much better," Spirit sighed, her eyes joining mine as we stared up at the stars above us. "I never get tired of this, dead or not."

I snorted abruptly. "Sorry," I smiled, "I just forget that you're actually a ghost sometimes."

She rolled her eyes before sitting down on the crops, which were also frozen in time.

"So? What did you need?"

Cursed Blood - 58.Awaiting an Explanation.58[1,286 words]

I considered her question, mulling it over in my head until I shrugged helplessly.

"I honestly don't know. I just needed to come here," I admitted, "your presence is comforting. It reminds me that this is real."

"Why wouldn't it be?"

There was a long, drawn out pause. I wanted to avoid her question, but at the same time, I knew this was one of the only places where I could speak my true mind. After all, Spirit died when people tried to turn her into what I was. I gave up, sitting down next to her on the frozen ground.

"Because I grew up on a farm, with no magic, and planned the entire time to just be a plain citizen. This is like a dream.

"Or a nightmare...," I added, resting my chin on my arms, which were on top of my knees that I'd hugged to my chest while speaking. Spirit hummed, going silent for a while.

"Do you want to go back?"

A frown came to my face as I turned to her. "What?"

"Do you want to go back in time? Stop the original attack on your family. Change your life, reset what has happened."

The question struck too close to home for my liking.

Would I go back to simpler times if I could?

A full family of six, all living and working on a farm together. Less use of magic, no worries about training. No Darkblood camps or angel wings or tattoos. The Prince would be just a leadership figure, and his warriors would be unknown. No power. No Rebecca, Dmitri or Daisy. Janora and Raeni would be non-existent to me. I'd still live with my mother, having girls' days and not realising she hated me.

"Why?"

It was Spirit's turn to look surprised. "Why am I asking you?"

I nodded, and she continued. "You're linked to the gods, dear Cloud. One of them could reset time for you, if you wanted."

"Why me?" I asked in a small voice. *Why would gods do anything for me?*

"You are special to them, Cloud. A part of someone that is special to them. That person is who you must find," Spirit answered vaguely. I sighed, leaning my head to the side as if I was about to sleep under the frozen stars.

"I wouldn't give this up."

Once again, she looked surprised. I eyed her cautiously. "Did you expect me to?"

Spirit chewed her lip. "Yes, I did. I would've done anything to get my life back and stop the experiments. Stop everything.

"But," she continued, "if I did that... You wouldn't have been who you are. So it would've been selfish of me."

"You wouldn't have known," I shrugged, lights twinkling above us. Spirit and I were silent, our words already dampening our moods.

"Cloud, if you have really chosen this life, then I think you'll be able to figure it out just fine."

The woman got to her feet, brushing off her bottom before looking down at me.

"Just remember that I'm always here," she smiled. "By now, my only purpose is to help you."

Just like that, the world around us slowly faded back into reality, and Spirit flickered before disappearing. I got to my feet, dragging them along the ground as I left the farm.

Once out on the street, I looked back to see that another light was on in the house. A mother, I'm assuming, bounced a baby in her arms, smiling at them like they were her whole world. There was an ache in my heart as I turned to leave, eyes on the ground. Part of me almost wished I could sit back and let whatever happened happen, but another part was in too deep to go back now.

With that, I went back home.

It had been two days, and all I'd done was avoid people and read books. The only person I spoke to was Janora, since I had yet to visit the Darkblood camp since the ball. I was avoiding my brothers and their worried stares, as well as the Prince and his warriors. Janora and I would read in the library together -- she would study history, and I would study my own thing. She seemed to understand it was personal and left me alone for the most part.

On the third day, I was alone. Stuffed into the corner of the library, an empty cup that once had tea in it beside me. Janora hadn't visited or stopped by at all, and I felt rather disappointed. Lonely, as well, with the silence of the library eventually getting to me. I had a lack of sleep and was easily irritable, the book flying from my hands to one of the shelves as I raged for a moment, throwing more than one.

When the mess around me began to get too large, I groaned and leaned back into the wall.

"Cloud," someone said softly. They were on the other side of the shelves.

I got to my feet, cheeks bright red. *They probably witnessed my tantrum*, I thought, rounding the corner.

It was Jason Taylor, advisor to the Queen. One of the old legendary warriors, one of Lillian's friends.

"M. Taylor, I am so sorry if I bothered you," I quickly rushed, bowing my head to avoid his eyes.

"I'm not bothered," he chuckled, "actually, Lillian asked me to send you to the nearest tea room to meet with her."

My eyes widened and I glanced back at the mess I made. Before I could dash to clean it, Jason put a hand on my arm.

"I'll fix this. Go meet with her."

I apologized and thanked him twice before scampering from the library. I wasn't crazy about having to see Lillian, but I also didn't want to disrespect her. Making it to the tea room in record time, I pushed the door open without a second thought and rushed inside the room.

It wasn't just Lillian, though.

Every table sat a group of people. Elijah and his favourite warriors. Dmitri, the scholars. My brothers and father. Janora, Raeni, Lillian. The Queen herself. Hell, Kai was lounging outside the window.

My throat closed, and I felt like I was going to vomit staring at all of them. They looked at me expectantly, as if *I* was the one who surprised them.

"What the hell is going on?" I eventually choked out. The Prince looked ready to respond, but my glare cut him off. Instead it was Terrance who strolled toward me, slowly explaining as he went.

"Janora, and Jason, have told us about your reading habits and how you've been obsessing over something. We just wanted to help, but we knew you wouldn't come to us yourself."

"So you gang up on me in here?" I snapped, taking a step back from him. My fingers itched, and there was a feeling of discomfort around my shoulder blades.

"We're just trying to help, Cloud," Terrance assured me in a soft voice. I couldn't tell why I was this defensive, but something about the room filled with people staring back at me made me antsy.

My brother gently took my hand in his. "Just tell us what you've been looking for. We want to help."

"You want to know what I've been doing?"

Angry, my eyes fell to the Prince's.

"I've been following some wild goosechase to get my own answers. Because some people are trying to keep them from me."

The Queen had the decency to lool ashamed as well.

"So unless you plan on actually helping, I suggest you get the hell away from me," I snapped, trying to pull away from my brother. His grip tightened, a twinge of pain appearing in my hand.

"We already discussed it. We've just been waiting for an explanation."

I ground my teeth together, yanking myself away.

"Fine. Then sit down and listen up, kiddies."

Cursed Blood - 59.A Good Queen.59[981 words]

Once I got through the beginning of my story, up until the events before the ball that only a few hadn't known of, explaining the situation got a lot harder. There was the gods matter, the conversations with Spirit, the red eyed man, the assassin -- everything that added another layer of struggles. The only thing I decided to hold back was the part about the assassin, everything else came flooding out like a waterfall. I sat on one table, talking endlessly while the others listened.

"Rebecca -- my Darkblood friend -- she once told me a story about how people in the past, when there were clans instead of kingdoms, tried to mix the blood types to create a halfbreed. Like me.

In the story, the girl they used for the experiments died, and a war began. That's why we were divided as we are now.

That girl... her spirit is around still. She first came to me in the halls, and warned me that another war, something she called the Gray War, was coming. That I'd lose more than Terrance.

I've seen her twice since then. Spoken to her. She wants me to find out about the gods, specifically a female one, she wouldn't tell me her name."

I sighed, tilting my head to the side as I did my best to remember.

"Then there was a man who appeared and disappeared. He spoke about reincarnation and the gods as well. All this time, I've been trying to learn about them.

"That painting," I said, looking at the Prince. "It has the man in it. That's why I was so curious."

"So that's where that went," the Queen muttered.

I nodded her way before putting my face in my hands.

"And at the end of it, there was the dome in the ballroom during the Ball of Demons. I... I don't even know how that happened. Hell, I don't know the extent of my own powers."

The Queen cleared her throat.

"I'll be honest, we don't have anything useful to tell you. We don't know your limits either," she confessed, "but if we find anything, you'll be the first to know."

I laughed dryly. "At this point, I don't think anyone is useful to me. They're either clueless or keeping it from me."

More than a few of them had the decency to either look ashamed or sympathetic. There was silence, one that weighed heavily down on all of us.

I must be such a burden to them.

A threat, yet someone they have to protect. A bucketload of problems, yet someone they can't control.

But I can't feel sorry for them. Not after that.

"So what can we do to help?"

Everyone paused to find the owner of the voice. It was Gene, one of the first soldiers who hated me.

"Gene?"

He nodded my way. "I was foolish earlier. You're a source of great power, and loyal to your friends. I'm sorry. Let us help you find out what you need to know."

Like I almost let an assassin kill the Queen?

The only reason I stopped was to save that brat Prince...

Oh how I wish--

No.

My thoughts had gone dark, but I forced them to be silent.

"I would appreciate that. I need books and teachers on the gods. And those scholars that were at the ball, they're exactly who I need. Dmitri and those two are the closest thing I have to a team of experts."

The Queen nodded. "I can call them for you, they'll meet you for dinner tonight."

"Thank you."

"I'll join the three of you," Dmitri added. It had seemed like weight had been lifted off my shoulders once I told them the *almost* full story. I smiled at him.

"So, do you want us to look for more books?" Janora asked. "I've seen you pile some up in your bedroom. I know for a fact some of those will be useless."

Raeni, who's been hidden from my view this entire time, jumped to her feet. "We should put the useless ones back, come on!"

The two scampered from the room, Raeni dragging Janora in a way that made me laugh. I couldn't help but grin as the others joined in as well.

Maybe... Just maybe, these people didn't mean to hurt me.

Slowly, they all gave themselves jobs and left the room until it was the Rose family and one last straggler.

The young Prince himself, staring at the floor with shame radiating off of him. My new sense that allowed me to read emotions was triggered by his mere presence.

"I can't help but think," Elijah began, "that you'd be a good Queen. Over both races. After all, you belong to both. And everyone was jumping at the opportunity to help you."

You're not the only one who thinks that way. A certain assassin would agree.

"They just respect my power, not me," I snapped, walking to my brothers. Terrance had moved back over to them and they were too busy thanking him for calming me down to pay attention.

Elijah sighed. "You're wrong. You didn't always have that power, Cloud. It's you. All you."

"I wouldn't be here," I snarled, "if it wasn't for the fact I was the Gray One. Without any of this magic, I'd be just another farmer. No one would've blinked twice in my direction."

"They're all drawn to you. Your aura, even if it hurts sometimes. You know secrets and you're always on another adventure or hunting the answer to another mystery..."

He's rambling. Worse, he's ignoring me.

I growled, grinding my teeth together. I turned to go, to ignore him, but his words caught my attention.

"It's like we're all just meant to worship you, because you understand us. Even if you don't realize it."

I finally turned my back on him.

"Get some sleep, Princeling. You're delusional."

As I walked toward my brothers, his chair creaked and his footsteps began, only to get fainter.

However, I didn't miss his last words.

"Or maybe I'm just too accurate for you to admit."

Cursed Blood - 60.Dinner with Scholars.60[1,128 words]

That night, I was getting ready for dinner with the scholars and Dmitri. I was dressed in a fancier style, my dress green and white. A knife was strapped to my leg underneath the skirt, out of precaution, or maybe paranoia. My hair, which had been cut by a servant hours before, brushed my collarbone in loose curls. Silver bracelets rested on my wrists, and I wore flats instead of heels.

"Hey, angel."

I gasped, turning around to see the red eyed man in my room.

"You're getting closer, my dear."

With that, his words hit me and he vanished into thin air. I considered screaming, releasing all my anger, but held my tongue.

What was that? A hallucination? A tease?

I slowly calmed back down.

No. Maybe... Maybe it was a test.

Instead of bothering with it, with his attempt at communication, I left my room. My footsteps were strong and sure as I strode toward the dining room, ready to meet Dmitri and the scholars. A guard outside the room held the door open for me, and when I entered, the scholars were on their feet. Dmitri looked uncomfortable, unsure as to why they stood.

"The Gray One. Good to see you again."

Lori, with platinum blonde hair, and Athena, with red hair. Sisters that weren't actually sisters, but best friends and partners in their studies.

"Gosh, please sit," I waved for them to stop, "and remember, it's just Cloud. Nice to see you both."

"Thanks for coming," I added, "all three of you."

They nodded as I took my spot next to Dmitri. The scholars sat beside each other opposite of us, looking alert. Our chatter remained light and on basic topics as we began dinner, but as the food began to disappear, I gathered my courage.

"I called you here to ask for help," I blurted.

Athena and Lori raised their eyebrows. "Our help?"

"I know that who I am is tied to the gods. Some female god has all my answers. I need your help to figure out who she is," I explained, motioning to Dmitri. "He'll help us."

Lori's eyes sparkled with excitement. "Are you kidding me? That's amazing!"

"Are you a demi-god, maybe?" Athena proposed, holding her chin in one hand, completely forgetting about her dinner.

"I'm unsure," I shrugged, "but I have a few hints from beings I've met."

The scholars had matching mischievous expressions. "Please, do tell."

With that, I explained the situation. They listened respectfully, consistently whispering their own theories to each other. When I mentioned Spirit or the red eyed man, both of them looked appropriately awed. Dmitri, even though it was his second time hearing this, also looked impressed.

"So?"

Lori shared a shadowy smile with her almost-sister. In turn, Athena smiled. The blonde scholar looked between Dmitri and I before grinning.

"We're in."

"So this is it, eh?"

Dmitri, the scholars and I stood in a private study provided by the Queen, staring at the pile of books on one table. The rest of the room had desks, shelves and more chairs, though each piece of furniture had been cleaned and emptied for our use. Athena and Lori didn't hesitate before attacking the stack, reading out various titles as Dmitri and I wandered the room.

The others were already doing their best to help me, and the thought of it made my chest swell with pride. The hopeful part of me was starting to believe I could trust them again. It was healing my scarred heart, and everytime I closed my eyes, I didn't hear the sound of a foot connecting with my gut.

"Hey, Lori," Athena suddenly piped up, "do you remember this story?"

Dmitri and I looked over curiously, watching the two scholars scan the pages of a small book.

"What is it?" Dmitri finally asked, both of us losing interest as they read in silence.

"The story about how some mixed god almost disappeared forever after a botched reincarnation. It's what got us interested in being scholars about these types of things."

Something nagged at the back of my mind. "What's the story?"

Athena smiled, allowing Lori to read while she explained. "Basically the gods are separated into minor and major gods. Minors have more limits on their powers; their domains are very specific. Major gods, however, have vast amounts of power and are well known. No one can prove which is stronger, though major gods rule over everything. There was one particular goddess who actually existed like a god and a messenger -- she was classified as both a minor and a major. She worked to keep peace and all that between the two levels, but a war broke out. The only casualty in the *entire godly war* was her. This hurt everyone else because everyone loved her, she was a mix of everything. The goddess related to everyone and understood them as well -- to put it simply, they loved her."

Her sister scholar glanced up, taking over the story. "The entire population of godly beings decided to work together to gather enough force to reincarnate the mixed goddess. However, she was already partially being remade, so when they did their own ritual to save her, it messed with what she was already doing to save herself. Supposedly everything went haywire, so now she's like a wisp of a goddess. She can still work as a middle man, but she doesn't have access to any actual magic. Like being a negotiator -- you don't fight the battles, you talk your way to peace."

Incredible. The myths of this world, of the different bloods, are absolutely amazing.

"Sometimes people even say that she would protect the clans of the different bloods from misfortune. Supposedly, she advocated for peace between the two. There's been whispers that people once tried to create a hybrid like you in her name, but those are just theories."

"What was her name?"

The scholars shared grins. "They called her Angel, since she was pure in everyone's eyes and a messenger."

Angel.

My eyes widened, my head throbbing. Something like a memory was threatening to awaken.

The red eyed man, the one from the painting of the gods.

He would call me Angel.

My file, back when Lillian gave me a copy.

Written in the margin, was Angel.

The last time I visited Spirit, she told me the gods would rewind the clock for me. Reset my life if I wanted them to, because I was someone special to them.

Like how Angel was special to them. Their precious, all-powerful mixed breed. Their own godly hybrid.

That red eyed man.

He... He mentioned a botched reincarnation.

Am I... Am I really...

"Cloud?"

The other three were looking at me in worry. I'd been staring at the ground with wide eyes, the puzzle pieces falling into a shaky formation.

"Is something wrong?" Athena asked.

"No... I just..."

They hung onto my every word.

"I..."

I looked up, meeting their eyes but also avoiding them.

"I know who I am."