**Overwhelm**

*David Kholodenko*

Content Warnings:

Transphobia, Descriptions of murder and death

Note: At times, this story uses color to indicate different speakers/influences/thoughts. I have applied text formatting and other indicators so that color-blind readers may have an easier time distinguishing between them. Let me know if you have any suggestions!

Also, Word may not like some things I did – you may need to disable the editor/grammar checker if it hinders readability.

“You killed my son!”

Those words echoed down the summit and across the valley, setting the birds aflutter amidst the harsh breeze. A faint vermilion clouded the skies as the Mount belched flames not seen in thousands of years.

“Twelve years ago. Your curse has haunted us since the dawn of time. And twelve years ago, you took my son.”

Reds and yellows danced across the room, the only light to be found. The window was shut, the door was closed, but I could hear commotion. No, commotion would be too benign. Plotting? Grandstanding? Fear, ground by the pestle of prophecy, had been refined into motivation. Determination. For them, what must be done lay behind that door.

“!!!!!!!”

“Yes, Fath-”

The door gave way to a retinue of courtiers, yes men, gentry, and guards. The window remained shut, and yet the coldest of breezes ran down my back, through my robes. Faint chatter gave way to deafening silence.

“The Moon has fallen, and the sky remains silent. You know what this means. It is time to *begin*.”

“…”

“I will give you one chance, and only one, to atone. The son must *become*. You will let go, and prepare yourself for what lies ahead.”

“. . . . .”

Only a fool could mistake my cowardice for silent resolution. Perhaps he was surrounded by them, but Father wasn’t a fool. He could pierce minds, break the dams within, and flood the soul.

“I will NOT allow this. You” – he grabbed my arm – “will *become!* You will follow me and your descendants. You will Bear the Guilt, and repent for your ancestor. You Must.”

“. . . . . . . . . .”

The fools spoke with bated whispers and chants.

“. . . n o . . .”

I could’ve sworn the shadows were dancing amidst the embers, flying across the wooden beams and furniture. Certainly, they were the only ones moving.

“…no…”

Once more I whimpered, and yet once more my arm remained under firm control. The time for words had passed, and I was hauled outside. The darkness of the night laid bare before us; the shadows still danced. Darkness amidst darkness.

The needles of the trees had somehow withstood the heavy snow that piled on. They were almost indestructible, as if made by the Deities themselves. And yet, their bark was remarkably like that of the houses and fences nearby. Not that I could tell anyway, as my face rapidly approached the slush on the ground.

Footsteps fell around me.

“Get up.”

I did so.

“Repent.”

I did not.

“Repent.”

I did not.

“Repent for the sins of the ancestor. Repent for the one who doomed us all.”

I did not.

“Repent for the curse.”

I did not.

“We are CURSED! DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND? THE ONE WHO DOOMED OUR FAMILY, OUR ANCESTOR, OUR PROGENITOR? WHO CURSED US WITH \*THIS\* BLADE?”

I didn’t know it yet, but I was unsheathed behind me.

“…Clearly, you do not understand. I… I will show you.”

A voice rang out from behind, as meek as mine:

*“…leave her be… maybe it’s best to lea—”*

Red. Unmistakable red soaked the snow and filled my eyes. The darkness of the night gave way to crimson. My teeth tasted iron, my throat gulped fear, and the crucible within me birthed rage.

So when I stood up, and the sword my father used sprang into my hands, I felt what he felt for the first time in my life. Pure, unadulterated anger. Lust for a violence so cruel, so painful, so infuriatingly unavailable.

“What… what is this? You will release that sword!”

“……”

“No… The Curse…”

My voice spoke, but not from my body.

“It Continues.”

“Awakened by Blood, Borne of Revenge. I Have Come To Right The Wrongs.”

…

I was roused by the sounds of Morningbirds. I didn’t know where I was at this point, only that I needed to-

“Run. Keep Running, And Don’t Turn Around.”

I was dazed and disoriented. Just how long had it been? And who was within me? I didn’t know what it meant to have the Curse at that point, but the last thing I expected was-

A second soul.

A second soul, merged into my own. The Curse, once confined to an ornamental blade, had now merged itself with me.

I became a phantom, a wraith. Able to manipulate.

Able to be myself. Ironically, the prophecies and fates that constricted my life had unraveled themselves and allowed me to breathe while in limbo. I could now change my own form, despite the newfound translucency. In truth, it wasn’t difficult to accept it all. Aside from

The embers of Hate flickering within my soul

and the inability to be in public, I quickly grew fond of myself. The curse was I; I was the curse. I grasped my hair and pulled it down, all the way to my knees. My robe, once scarlet, now matched my pale blue complexion.

And I was free.

At least, I had thought so-

But hate and revenge still chained my heart. |No, you were. You are.|

The Mount continued to bellow.

“The malfeasant form before me… do you find it mocking?”

“Your Son Never Was. The Curse Is Not To Be Taken Lightly, And You Of All People Should Know The Price Of Transgression. You Sought To Abuse Your Kin; And Thus, Revenge Was Born.”

“LIAR! Thief! Murderer! Stealer of Souls and Reaper of Blood! You shall not have this day! The mountain’s roar echoes your demise. Your ghastly form will be torched by the Deities’ flames.”

“Your son never was, Father. Do you blame the Curse? Do you even remember that night? You thrust your way into my room, bringing declarations of prophecy. You sought to usurp my autonomy for your gain. And you’re surprised that I tried to defend myself?

For You, The Curse Is A Nightmare; For Me, It’s A Long Time Coming.”

“You remember NOTHING. You are a Curse. Even before you took that blade, you were a curse. A scourge. You denied fate at every turn. Your destiny was to be a man – my son. It was written. Written! And yet, you choose to appear as this… abomination. I was too weak to allow it to go that far. It’s a mistake that I refuse to make again!”

For twelve years, I wandered across the Middle Kingdom. I’d like to say I found peace in solitude, but |certain elements| prevented that. All I could feel in my travels was |Hate|.

Hate

for the man who claimed to raise me.

Hate

for the lineage that caused this whole ordeal.

Hate

that I could not stop him from killing.

Hate

that I might not stop myself from killing him.

Maybe I lied – I wasn’t entirely free. I quickly learned to keep away from the villages and towns during the day, as most would either flee or try to kill me. Even animals bolted as soon as they sensed my presence. It was lonely. I had no desire for friends or carnal needs, and yet I was isolated. All I could feel was

Sadness. Hate.

Yes, Sadness. No, Hate.

There was nobody who could understand me. They were all afraid.

And I couldn’t even understand myself. Yet what drove me was perfectly clear.

So how could I move on? How could I live without |Hate| love? The more I pondered, the swifter the shadows danced. Panting and chanting and gallivanting in the recesses.

Maybe this is what the Curse is for me. Loneliness? There is only one cure. He must die.

I can’t keep going like this. He must die.

Hate. Hate Hate Hate . Hate Hate HateHateHateHateHateHateHateHate HateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHateHate

I didn’t choose this form, but I can choose what I do. I will not allow my judgment to be clouded like this! I can control this! I can control it! I am me! I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS I CAN BREAK THROUGH THIS

No. I cannot hate again. I’ve lived my whole life in hatred, borne of fear. Generation after generation, living the same nightmare over and over. I can|not| overcome it.

“Enough. Despite your performance and persistence otherwise, I had no daughter - only a liar, a miscreant pup. And now, I shall have your demise.”

It’s rather funny. I’ve spent my whole life running, and yet here I am facing my fate once more. And despite everything, I want to run. But at this point I don’t think I have a choi—

kill.

YEEEARGH!

He lunged, and the Mount roared. The auburn skies gave way to crimson…