

Title: Demon Hearts and Angel Prayers

Rating: K+ (tentatively)

Series: Kingdom Hearts

Pairing: Cloud/Aerith

Summary: Set before, during, and after the game. This story follows two lost lovers as they search for each other.

Disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts and its characters are the property of Disney and Square-Enix, (respectively) and they reserve all rights. The song used in the second part is "*You're Not Alone*," the song is from Final Fantasy IX (9) and the lyrics are by Nick Maddix. As usual, they reserve any and all rights.

Authors Note: This story was inspired by several Kingdom Hearts stories; which are; "*I Want To Meet You*" by **Snowri**, "*Untouched Requiem*" by **neko-kilala**, and "*Guiding Dark Stars Light*" by **The Crimson Comet**. All of these are wonderful Cloud/Aerith stories, please give them a read.

Authors Note 2: I'd like to explain the titling of the parts. **Before The Night** is set pre-game. **All Through The Night** is set during the game. **Dawn Awakens** is set after the game. I hope this helps you in your reading.

*There is darkness within us all;  
Little whispers leading us astray. It isn't these whispers that make men evil;  
It is the men themselves. Within every person's heart there is a choice;  
Whether to do good, or to follow the voices and do evil. In the end the decision to either love, or hate lies  
solely in the heart.*

Unknown Author, Unknown Date

## **Before The Night**

Cloud looked on as the other children played their games, longing to be a part yet knowing they would reject him. It was a vicious cycle that he'd been through so many times before.

Tifa claimed to be his friend, yet when he asked to play he was shunned, a terrible thing for a child to face.

Sitting alone in the shadow of the old tree that dominated the edge of the playground, Cloud felt safe hidden within its shadows. He himself a shadow only visible when he moved. That was the way he liked it, hidden away from the world and all its cruelty.

Day after day, year after year, this went on, and he fell further and further into the darkness, until one day when that all changed.

It had begun as a regular day, Cloud got up and went to school, and he did his homework but never applied himself. After finishing his homework he waited for the bell to signal recess. When it did he was the last to leave the room, keeping himself to the shadows as much as possible, trying to avoid the bullies that would pick on him if they found him. After making it safely to the playground he instantly retreated to the safety of his tree, the other students paying him no mind, not even his 'friend' Tifa.

Recess was held after the 2nd class and the 4th class, giving the students time to relax. They were given 30 minutes each period to run, jump, play, whatever it was to keep them relaxed. The more relaxed they were the less conflict there would be in the classroom, or so the school board thought. The bullies were still around and the teachers ignored them, what could they do anyway?

The school didn't call it recess, they called it 'exercise period,' but they were the same thing. This 'exercise

period' started like all the others, Cloud at his tree, the other children playing whatever game took their fancy at the time. Then it happened, a silent commotion that spread across the playground like wildfire. Students dropped their balls and ropes as a tight knot was formed around the building entrance, this only meant one thing, a new student.

As uninterested as he was, Cloud couldn't help but move towards the mob, being pulled by an unknown force towards destiny. He stopped, several feet from the other students, just close enough to see the principal standing behind a young girl.

Unable to hear what was being said, he just stood there, watching. After a few minutes the principal left, leaving the new girl to the mercy of the students. As the uninterested moved off he caught a glimpse of chestnut brown hair tied back with a dark pink ribbon, and a pink dress with brown hiking boots. On her left wrist she wore silver bangles. Deciding that it was yet another student that he wouldn't want to meet, Cloud returned to the shadows, unaware of a pair of green eyes watching him.

The bell rang again, releasing the students to the second exercise period. This period was no different than the one after 2nd period, all the same routines were played out in mindless fashion.

Cloud had been settled into his sanctuary, looking away from the other students towards the mountain range that hugged their little town, cradling it within its arms of rock.

He was used to people occasionally coming over to poke fun at him, calling him a freak, pointing and laughing, then returning to their interrupted game.

So he wasn't surprised to feel a presence behind him, who was it this time, Ken, Jennifer, Johnny? Maybe the Principal had come to laugh at him this time, or a teacher, they weren't above it. After all, they're only human, and its human nature to fear what you don't understand. No one understood the pain that Cloud felt, no one had ever tried.

So it goes without saying that he was immensely surprised when the shadow sat down next to him. No one ever did that. So, against his better judgement he turned to look at the person and found two green pools staring back at him.

He was momentarily lost in their depths before he pulled himself together and looked past them. Behind those eyes he saw an Angel. It was the new girl, and she was smiling kindly at him.

"Hello," she said in a soft voice much like the sound of the wind blowing through a field of flowers.

Cloud did not immediately answer, no one had ever approached him of their own will and talked to him. Yet here was this beautiful girl, smiling and talking to him.

"H ... h ... hi," he stammered out as he pulled his eyes from her and directed them to the ground.

"My name is Aerith, what's yours?"

"Cloud," he replied in a small voice.

"Cloud," she repeated, saying his name several times as though getting the feel of it on her tongue. "That's a nice name."

"Thanks," he mumbled out, eyes still downcast.

"Why are you all alone over here?" She asked after watching him for a few moments.

"I'm not like them so they don't want to play with me," he admitted after a minute of silence.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, I've always known I was different, that I didn't belong with them. They can sense that and ignore me. It's no big deal, they've been doing it as long as I can remember, I'm used to it," he told her, hoping that she too would leave him to his solitude like so many others had.

She sat for a moment before replying.

"No one should have to be alone. Do you want to play with me?" she asked him with eyes shining hopefully.

"Ye .. yea .. yeah," he stammered out surprised that she didn't leave. And even more that she wanted to play with him.

She merely smiled as she took his hand and pulled him from the shadows and into the light.

Aerith and Cloud became good friends after that day. Never once did she regret her decision to befriend the blonde boy that had filled her mind since she first saw him. The same blonde that now filled her heart.

Cloud soon forgot about all the pain and loneliness that the other's had caused in him, Aerith was a beacon to him, a light in the dark, leading him to salvation. For many years they played together as friends, slowly the other children befriended Cloud, further ending his isolation.

~\*~

Seven years after they met, Cloud nervously approached Aerith's door, today was her 17th birthday, February 7. She was a year older than he was. It was a cold February this year, the wind blew forebodingly. Cloud shivered as he walked the path to her door, present in hand.

During the short walk, Cloud had time to think about what his life was like now that Aerith was in it. he and Aerith spent all their time together, every waking moment. So much so that the other kids they knew slowly drifted away, leaving only Cloud and Aerith.

Cloud knocked on the door and waited for her mother to answer. Seconds later the door opened and a smiling woman peered out at him.

"Good afternoon Cloud," she said as he stepped inside.

"Good afternoon ma'am," he replied as he removed his jacket and placed it on a hook by the door.

"Cloud, we're practically family, you can call me Elmyra or mom, which ever you'd like."

"Thank you ... mom," he replied sheepishly, wondering at the way the word felt on his tongue. His own parents had died many years ago when he was 5, he had few memories of them. Since their death he had been living with a close friend of the family. A year before he met Aerith the friend died in a mountain climbing accident, leaving his entire estate along with his parent's to a then 7 year old Cloud.

No one would ever speak about his parents with him, it was almost a taboo subject among the townspeople. He never truly knew what it was like to have a mother that cared for you, not until he met Aerith and her

mother.

Elmyra was a kindly lady in her mid-forties. She had taken Cloud under her wing and cared for him as though he were her own child. He could always talk to her when he needed to.

"Well now, doesn't that sound nice?" she mused as she escorted Cloud to the dining room where the party was.

Cloud merely nodded as he quickly took in those already in the room.

Cloud and Aerith may have been inseparable friends, but that didn't stop them from having other friends, all of whom were now gathered around Aerith as she sat opening presents.

"Cloud!" Aerith exclaimed as her best friend entered the room, she ran to give him a hug, leaving the half opened present on the table.

"Happy Birthday Aerith," Cloud said as he returned the hug. Releasing her he gave her the gift he carried and led her back to the table. He nodded at everyone in greeting.

The next few minutes were a flurry of color as paper was torn from boxes and thrown from bags. The last present was wrapped in simple pink paper and tied with a ribbon of a lighter shade. Aerith took it and began to open it slowly, this was Cloud's present.

Once the outer paper was removed, Aerith found a small jewelry box made of black velvet. Opening it she found a beautiful silver necklace with a small pink rose pendant hanging from it. She removed the necklace from the box and attempted to put it on, but her long hair got in the way. Cloud stepped forward to help and soon had the rose resting against her throat.

"Thank you Cloud," she replied as she looked into his smiling eyes, "thank you everyone, this has been a wonderful birthday." She said as she turned to the other guests, preventing her from getting lost in Cloud's sky blue eyes.

After the party was over Cloud and Aerith went for a walk, the other kids having gone home with their parents.

"Aerith, there's something I want to tell you," Cloud said as they stood looking towards the heavens, the wind blowing around them, forcing them together for warmth.

"What is it?" she asked, fearing the sudden note of sadness in his voice.

"I have decided to become a knight for the king. I'm leaving for the castle tomorrow."

To Aerith it seemed as though his announcement had sucked the breath from her body.

"Why?" she asked softly, unable to breathe fully.

"I need to prove myself, I can't stay around here anymore, not as the failure that everyone views me to be. You have never seen me like that, and that is why I make this promise to you. Aerith, I love you, but I must go. But I swear on my heart and soul that if ever you need me, I will be there. I will always be there to protect you, no matter what," he grabbed her hands and held them, pulling her closer to him.

"Always? You'll always be my bodyguard Cloud, no one else can ever take that from you, nor can they take

my love. I love you too Cloud," she admitted close to tears.

Cloud closed his eyes as he pulled her against him and just held her, silent tears falling from her eyes to soak his jacket.

"Aerith, make me a promise. Promise me that no matter what, you'll wait for me and not give up."

"I promise Cloud, with my very heart and soul," she replied as she slowly reached up and kissed him gently on the lips. A promise sealed between two lovers.

"I must leave now," Cloud said as he slowly pulled away from her. She reluctantly removed her arms from around him, her right hand going to her new pendant.

Slowly Cloud retreated into the night, his eyes never leaving Aerith's face as though memorizing every detail. All too soon Cloud was swallowed up by the shadows from which Aerith had pulled him those many years before.

Once he was gone Aerith ran to her mother and told her everything, even that Cloud said he loved her. Elmyra smiled as she gently stroked her daughter's hair as she cried for the boy she loved. Destiny, it seems, had united the two lovers at last.

~\*~

The next year past quickly for Aerith, she would receive letters from Cloud telling her about his progress in the king's army.

Cloud had progressed rapidly through the ranks, in one year he had gone from a recruit to one of the king's elite guard, the Seraphim, given the duty of protecting the city from attack. He had quickly rose through their ranks as well, he was now a 1st Class Seraphim, the highest rank obtainable by one who isn't royalty. A 1st class even had ranking over a General in matters dealing with the king.

This day was special however, today was a warm Summer day, the wind blowing through the trees. The scent of flowers in bloom on the air. It was also the day Cloud was coming home for a visit.

Aerith had gone many times to see Cloud at the castle, she would always wait for him in the library, reading books about flowers. Her favorite flower was still the one she wore around her neck.

Aerith was preparing lunch with her mother when a voice startled them. turning they found a cloaked figure standing in the door way, only it's brown boots were visible.

"Excuse me ladies," he said in a quiet voice. "I come with a message from Cloud Strife. He wishes me to tell you that he won't be coming today and asked me to extend his apologies."

With that he turned on his heel, a smile hidden in the darkness of the cloak.

"Wait a second!" Aerith said as the figure turned, causing him to stop and look at her. "You know, you're not very funny Cloud."

"I was wondering how long it would take you, Aerith." Cloud said as he removed the hood from his face, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief. "How'd you know it was me?"

He finished removing the cloak, revealing his dark blue uniform, and dark purple cape. On his left shoulder

he wore a guard of some sort, his Buster sword strapped to his back. His fitted uniform showed off the muscles that he had developed over the year he had trained.

"When you turned I saw your eyes," Aerith replied as she ran to embrace him. He caught her and hugged her, never wanting to let her go.

"I've missed you too Aerith, and you Elmyra," he said as he released Aerith and gave her mother a hug.

"Now Cloud, we've had this conversation before, call me mom."

"Yes mom," he replied with a grin as he rolled his eyes.

Aerith just giggled as she took his hand and lead him to the table.

"Sit down, we'll get you something to eat."

"Thank you, the journey was long and my feet are tired."

"You walked the entire way here from the castle?" Aerith asked in surprise, Cloud just grinned.

"Of course, I need to stay in shape don't I?"

Aerith just nodded as she fixed him a sandwich.

~\*~

The hours passed pleasantly for the two, they left Elmyra soon after Cloud ate. After that they strolled through the fields and forests of the town hand in hand.

"How long will you be staying?" Aerith asked as they reached their favorite spot. They were standing in a small clearing on the side of the mountain, overlooking the town below. The sun glinting off the river that ran through the center of town, the light playing on the rooftops.

"I must leave tomorrow night, the king is expecting me early the next morning."

"So that means that you'll be staying with mom and me then?" she asked with a spark in her eyes.

"Of course, I wouldn't come all this way to stay at my house. Besides, I rented that out awhile ago. Your place is the only one I could stay at," Cloud replied with a grin.

That night they had a small dinner in honor of Cloud's short return.

"Cloud, please tell us about the Seraphim, we don't hear much about them," Elmyra asked once they had settled by the fireplace in the living room. Cloud and Aerith sharing the couch while Elmyra was in a chair catching the warmth of the fire.

"As you know, we are the king's elite personal guards. A Seraphim 1st Class is the personal bodyguard of the king himself. He sends us on missions to do various tasks, escort important people from other lands, gather information, but most importantly is to protect him."

"What have you been doing since you joined?" Aerith asked from her place cuddled under Cloud's arm.

"Well, most of what I described. But recently the king has had me training with the Buster sword. I've been training with the Buster since I joined, but it's the drills he's running me through that are strange. He has me training to attack small objects almost at ground level. Oh well, I'm sure he knows what he's doing."

"Oh my, it's getting late," Elmyra said after looking at the clock above the mantle. "You two should get some sleep. Cloud, your room is right next to Aerith's. she'll take you there."

"Good night mother," Aerith said as she kissed her goodnight.

"Good night mom," Cloud said as he too kissed her goodnight.

"Good night Aerith, sleep well. Good night Cloud." She said as they disappeared up the stairs, hands still joined.

Elmyra sighed once they were gone.

"If only they had more time together, if only we all had more time."

Aerith led Cloud to his room.

"Well, this is it," she said as she sat on his bed while he looked around.

"Nice," he said noting the small touches that gave the room a warmth.

"Well, good night Cloud, I'll see you in the morning." Aerith kissed him on the cheek before standing and shutting the door behind her. Cloud sighed as he watched her leave. How he loved her.

With another sigh he prepared for bed, his sword resting against the wall, his cape slung over the hilt. Removing his boots he climbed into the soft bed. Falling asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

~\*~

The next day passed happily for the couple, they spent the entire day in each other's company, spending time they knew they wouldn't have again for a long time.

When evening finally arrived, there were many tears shed. Aerith cried as though Cloud were going away forever, Cloud felt the same way. Elmyra cried for she knew they wouldn't.

"Aerith," Cloud began as he said his final goodbye. "Aerith, I want you to come to the castle with me, just for a few days. Please say that you'll come," he begged with sad eyes.

"I don't know if mother will let me ..." she began only to be cut off.

"Go, I want you to go with him," Elmyra said with passion, startling them both. "Waste no more time talking, the road is long and time grows short. Please go before it's too late."

"Alright mother, I'll go with you Cloud. Goodbye mother, see you in a few days," Aerith said as she hugged her mother goodbye. Releasing her she and Cloud started off down the road, leaving a weeping Elmyra in their wake.

"No, Aerith, you won't. The time is upon us and there is nothing any of us can do."

~\*~

Reaching the castle the next day, Cloud found Aerith a guest room in the castle, rank did have its privileges after all.

Cloud left her to settle herself, having been summoned before the king.

"Your Majesty," Cloud said as he bowed.

"Cloud," the king began, "it is imperative that you and your men keep a watch tonight. There have been rumors of people disappearing from their homes without a trace. A darkness is threatening the land and we must stop it, at all costs."

"Understood your Majesty."

Cloud left the king to prepare for the night and the battle he felt coming, a battle for the very planet itself.

Dusk fell with an ominous finality, Cloud could feel it in his soul. A nagging feeling told him few would make it through the night, if any did at all.

Returning one last time before his patrol, Cloud entered Aerith's room.

"Aerith," he called.

"Over here Cloud," she answered from the small balcony.

"I have come to tell you to stay dressed and to gather your things. I don't know what it is, but a feeling tells me that you should run from this place. I want you to go to the port and find a ship. Don't argue, just do it. I can't explain it, but you must."

"I know, I've been feeling it too, the end is coming, the shadows are moving. I am ready to go with you."

"I'm not going," Cloud said as he shook his head. "My duty is to protect the people of this town, to protect you! I will do that even if I have to give up my life to do it. I made you a promise to protect you no matter what."

No more words were spoken as he closed the gap between them and kissed her. He kissed her as though there would be no tomorrow, and they both knew there wouldn't be.

Cloud released her lips from his, and she fell sobbing against his chest.

"Now I know why mother had me go with you, so that I could try and survive. She knew what was coming," she sobbed.

"I know," he said as he gently rubbed her back. "Aerith, no matter what happens tonight, I will find you, if you just keep up hope."

With that he released her and left her room, determined to face the coming battle head on.

"Cloud, I love you," she whispered into the night.

Far below her, a voice replied, "... I love you too, my Angel," then all was silent.

~\*~

That very night a storm seemed to appear from thin air. Lightning crashed and thunder clapped. Rain poured down on the sleeping castle. The Seraphim stood their watch, unaware of the coming doom.

Cloud watched the storm with a growing sadness.

*So, this is how it will all end, he mused. Swallowed by a storm spat forth from hell itself.*

Slowly the shadows of the storm overtook the castle, nightmarishly black creatures spawning from the darkness. Their yellow eyes searched for victims. They began running through the streets, appearing in houses without the use of a door.

Up on the parapets, the Seraphim could see lights coming on all across the town as both the storm intensified and the creatures began their unholy quest, stealing people's very hearts.

House by house the creatures moved, leaving a trail of heartless, soulless bodies. Cloud had seen enough, moving with all the speed he that possessed he sounds the evacuation alarm. Hopefully the new experimental 'Gummi Ships' would be able to save some of the people.

"Seraphim, weapons at the ready," he shouted. "We may not be able to stop these things but we can give the others time to escape. 'Til Death!"

"'Til Death!" they echoed as they raced to engage the creatures in battle.

Aerith ran through the streets, her belongings strapped to her back as she ran against the crowd. She had to find Cloud.

She heard the sounds of people shouting and moved in that direction.

She stopped when she saw Cloud, standing in a circle of his fellow Seraphim, all of them now victims of the creatures. Cloud fought with an intensity that seemed to keep the things at bay, for now.

"Cloud!" Aerith cried as she ran to him.

"Aerith, no stay there!" he replied as he quickly ran towards her. "Come on, we need to get to the Gummi Ships."

"Why?" she asked as they ran towards the docks.

"This world is lost, they are the only way to travel to another world, the only way to escape." He answered as they ran.

Shortly the docks were in sight, creatures stealing the hearts of people they knew, and people they didn't know. Right in front of them a General lost his heart and fell. Cloud merely continued to run, knowing there was nothing he could do.

His eyes grew wide as he saw the Gummi Ships lifting off, their hulls full of frightened people. He quickened his pace, pulling Aerith along faster. If he couldn't make it, then by all that was holy Aerith would. Reaching the last Gummi Ship, he picked her up and all but threw her into the closing door.

"CLOU....." was all she was able to say before her view was cut off. Racing to a window, she shoved the

person there out of the way. Her fears came true as she saw Cloud standing on the dock, sword raised as the creatures swarmed towards him. He charged, hoping to take a few of them with him.

Aerith watched in horror as the ship rose higher. She watched as slowly her world was swallowed by the storm, ending all life on the planet, including Cloud. The shock was too much for her to take, she fainted, her head hitting the floor as the Gummi Ship broke the atmosphere of what was once a planet.

~\*~

TBC