

The cursed blood novel

Chapter 1 - Chapter 1 (English Translation)

Chapter 1 The Cursed Blood 62 Chapter 1 #Chapter 1: Midwinter I ran the perimeter three times before the feast started, because the alternative was standing in the longhouse while sixty wolves pretended the air didn't taste different when I walked in. The snow was knee-deep in the upper meadow, shallower under the old-growth cedar where the canopy held. My wolf covered ground fast. Too fast, probably, burning off anxiety I'd never admit to in human form. Cold pressed against my ribs with every inhale, sharp enough that breath came out in white shocks.

The forest held no sound but my own paws hitting frozen ground. I'd been doing this for three weeks. Ever since my eighteenth birthday, when my first shift cracked open whatever had been sleeping in my blood and released a scent the pack couldn't name but couldn't ignore. Three weeks of dawn patrol. Not assigned, just there, at the eastern boundary where the territory dropped into the gorge and the wind came up smelling of ice and stone. Nobody told me to stop. Nobody asked me to join the regular rotation either.

The perimeter was mine the way corners of rooms were mine - by default, by the quiet arithmetic of a pack that didn't know where else to put me. I'd stood in the longhouse that first night, freshly shifted and still trembling from the transformation, and watched the room thin around me like water pulling back from a stone. *Ashvein.* 20 1/10 ||| 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter F I didn't learn the word until later. My mother said it to my father in the kitchen, quiet as a diagnosis, repeating something she'd read in a book of old bloodline records she'd pulled from the longhouse archive.

She'd gone still. Then poured more coffee. I'd stood in the hall in wet socks and added it to the growing list of things nobody would explain to me directly. Three weeks of the perimeter. Three weeks of running alone while the pack ran together. I shifted back at the treeline and dressed behind the generator shed. Jeans, boots, a thick wool sweater with sleeves long enough to cover my hands. The cold bit at my damp skin and my fingers shook trying to work the buttons. Inside the longhouse, the pack was already gathering. Laughter. The clink of earthenware.

The particular hum of forty conversations layering into one warm noise. The Midwinter feast. The longest night. I was expected. I went in through the kitchen entrance because it was closer to the corner where Wren kept the serving trays, and corners were easier than centers. The heat hit me first. Then the smell - -roasted elk, root vegetables, honey mead, cedar smoke from the old beams. And beneath all of it, the collective scent of Granholt Pack: fifty-eight wolves who smelled like family to each other and like caution around me. My stomach tightened before my brain caught up.

It always did. My mother found me loading trays. Elaine Ashwood was a small woman who generated force well beyond her mass, like a 2/10 20 O T ||| O < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 1 compressed spring. She adjusted the collar of my sweater without asking, tucking in a tag I hadn't noticed. Her knuckles brushed the back of my neck and didn't flinch away. "You ran the perimeter." Not a question. She could smell the snow on me. "Needed to stretch." 62 "You need to be present. Not running laps in the dark like a -" She stopped herself. *Like a rogue*, she'd almost said.

Wolves who ran the perimeter alone were either sentries or outcasts, and I wasn't on the patrol schedule. "I'm here," I said. She studied me with the particular intensity of a mother cataloguing damage she can't fix. Then she pressed a mug of mead into my hands. Warm ceramic against my frozen fingers. Her palm lingered a beat longer than it needed to. Then she walked back into the noise. I served. Refilled drinks. Cleared plates. The work was useful because it gave me a purpose that didn't require anyone to stand near me for longer than a handoff. I'd gotten good at reading the flinch.

The half-second delay before someone took a plate from my hands. The way their fingers avoided touching mine. Every time, something small and mean curled tight behind my ribs. A little hook pulling DO 20 3/10 1 T O < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 inward. I kept my face flat and my hands steady and told myself I wasn't counting. I was counting. Most of them didn't even know they were doing it. The Ashvein scent bypassed conscious thought and went straight to the lizard brain, the wolf brain, the part that said *wrong* before the human part could override it.

My father was standing by the fire with Alpha Edmund, the two of them shoulder to shoulder, laughing about something that had happened on a boundary survey last week. Dad caught my eye across the room and raised his mug. 67 His smile was the one he'd been wearing for three weeks warm, steady, and carrying about thirty percent more effort than it used to. He'd die before admitting the Ashvein scent bothered him. I believed that. I also believed it bothered him. Edmund clapped my father's shoulder.

The casual dominance of an Alpha who'd known his Beta for twenty years and still needed everyone to see the hierarchy. Ward Ashwood took it the way he took everything from Edmund - with a nod and a half-smile. It cost him something no one else in the room was paying attention to. Owen appeared at my elbow. My brother had the gift of materializing at the exact moment I was about to spiral. Twenty years old, built like Dad, green-eyed like me 13 but where my eyes made people think of deep forest, his made them think of meadows. Same color, different weight.

"You look like you're cataloguing escape routes." 20 1 a/to III O < Apr Chapter 1 "I'm counting serving trays." "Liar." He leaned his shoulder into mine - the easy, claiming weight of a brother who didn't care what my blood smelled like. "You've got the look. The one where you're calculating the distance to the nearest door and the odds of reaching it before someone asks you to stay." I almost smiled. "Sixty-two feet. Eighty percent." "Those are rogue odds. Have a drink." He steered the mug of mead toward my mouth with his own hand. "Eat something. Stay for the bonfire circle.

Then you can run the perimeter one more time and pretend you're checking for bears." "There are bears." "There are no bears. It's December. They're all asleep and smarter than both of us." I drank. 62 The mead was sweet and warm and tasted like the way this pack used to feel before my blood decided to announce itself to the world. The honey of it stuck in my throat a little. I let it. The bonfire circle formed after midnight, This was the old tradition. Wolves gathered around the central fire, the elders told winter stories, the youngest pups fell asleep in their parents' laps.

I sat on the outer ring, my back against a support pillar, where the firelight reached but the 20 OI T [1] < 5/10 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 M Chapter crowd didn't. Edmund was telling a story about the founding of Granholt - his great-grandfather, the first Alpha, who'd claimed this stretch of the Cascades when the forests were unbroken. I'd heard it before. Everyone had. The comfort was in the repetition. Owen dropped beside me, still chewing elk jerky. "Hazel wants to know if you'll do the solstice run." "The pack run?" "Midnight.

Everyone shifts, we run the territory, howl at the peak, come back for the second round of mead." He chewed, watching me. "You know. The tradition you've been avoiding for three weeks." I looked at my hands. The sweater sleeves covered my wrists completely. "I'll think about it." "That means no." "It means I'll think about it." He bumped his shoulder against mine and didn't move away. Owen's shoulder was the most reliable piece of real estate in my world, The midnight run started without me.

I watched from the porch as the pack filed out, fifty-odd wolves stripping jackets and shirts, shifting in the snow. The casual, fluid transformation of people who'd been doing this their whole lives. Fur and muscle and the particular joy of a body becoming what it was designed to be. 20 T 6/10 O Γ 62) Chapter! My father's wolf was a massive brown with silver at the muzzle. My mother's was sleek and dark. Owen's was Dad's build with greener eyes. I'd shifted three times since my birthday. Each time alone.

Each time at the perimeter, in the dark, where nobody had to see the Ashvein wolf and decide how to react. The pack ran. I watched them disappear into the treeline, the howls rising and layering into the night. Something in my throat ached at the sound -- a small, animal wanting I couldn't afford. I couldn't sleep. Wouldn't try. The longhouse was empty now, the bonfire burning down to embers, and the quiet felt like permission. I went out the kitchen door, stripped behind the generator shed, and shifted. The perimeter was mine.

-- east along the ridgeline, north through the old-growth, I ran it the way I always ran it dropping down to the gorge where the territory markers were oldest. My wolf's paws hit frozen ground in a rhythm that matched nothing but itself. No pack bond humming in the background. No mindlink. Just the forest and the cold and the particular freedom of being the only wolf in the world who ran this stretch of border on the longest night of the year. I was halfway along the eastern boundary when I caught his scent.

Cedar and clove and something green and something underneath, something alive and warm and reaching. It hit me mid-stride and my legs locked and my wolf planted all four paws in the snow and stood there, ribs heaving, ears flat, every nerve in my body igniting at once. Cole was on the ridge above me. 7/10 20 T O < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM Chapter I I'd seen him at the feast, earlier. Sitting in Edmund's cluster, laughing at something. - The wolf Edmund had chosen.

Not his son, not his blood his successor, handpicked at fifteen, groomed for Alpha through the merit system Edmund believed in more than bloodline. Twenty. Amber eyes flecked with gold. My brother's best friend since they were seven. I'd grown up in the same rooms as Cole. Close enough to know that he cracked his knuckles when nervous. That he kept butterscotch in his jacket pocket. That he once cried during a thunderstorm when he was twelve and made Owen swear never to tell.

Now he was in wolf form, dark brown fur almost black against the snow, standing at the territory edge where the eastern patrol route crossed the ridge trail. He'd broken from the pack run. Or maybe he'd never joined it. Twenty feet apart. Two wolves alone at the border in the dark. The resonance hit like a wall of sound. Heat spread from my sternum outward, flooding my chest, my legs, the roots of my fur. My wolf surged forward before I could stop her. One step. Two.

His wolf did the same, his body pulling toward mine with a force that had nothing to do with choice and everything to do with something older than either of us. *Resonance.* His wolf's eyes found mine. Amber, flecked with gold in the moonlight. For three heartbeats we stood in the snow at the territory edge and the forest was silent and the resonance sang between us like a wire pulled taut. 20 8/10 1 T O Chapter1 And his wolf was *reaching.* I could feel it - the pull in my chest like a fishhook, his wolf wanting mine with a force that bypassed thought entirely. Then the wind shifted.

My scent - my full scent, the Ashvein markers riding the resonance like a poison riding a current - reached him properly. His wolf flinched. A full-body recoil, ears back, weight shifting to his haunches. Not aggression. Recognition. And then - low, strangled, barely a sound at all - his wolf whined. One note. Broken in the middle. The kind of sound a wolf makes when it reaches for something and its own body refuses to let it close the distance. It carried across the twenty feet between us like a line I wasn't allowed to catch.

The involuntary arithmetic of a wolf whose position in the pack - the Alpha's successor, groomed since he was fifteen for the role - collided with the scent of the one bloodline no political future could afford. For one more heartbeat he held. His wolf and mine, twenty feet apart on the frozen ridge, the resonance still pulling, still singing, still there.* I could see the war in his posture -- the wanting and the knowing, the wolf and the man, the bond and the cost. Then Cole turned and ran. Not toward the pack. Not back to the longhouse.

Into the deep forest, fast, a dark shape dissolving into the trees. The resonance between us stretched thin as wire but didn't break. P MON 20 T ||| O < 9/10 Chapter 1 I stood on the ridge in the snow. My wolf's legs were shaking. The scent of cedar and clove lingered in the frozen air, mixing with the ash and copper followed me everywhere. For one moment both scents existed in the same space without either one flinching. Then the wind shifted. His scent scattered. Mine stayed. It always stayed. - End of chapter - that 10/10 20 T ||| < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. adminIf you enjoy this work,