

The cursed blood novel Chapter 2 - Chapter 2 (English Translation)

Chapter 2 Chapter 2 # Chapter 2: The Severing The rune marks came on a Tuesday in February, six weeks after the Midwinter feast. Not at the creek or the longhouse or anywhere that might have made the moment feel deliberate. 62 I was alone in the laundry room, folding towels that smelled like cedar soap, when heat bloomed across the inside of my left wrist. Not pain. Warmth. Intimate and specific, like a mouth pressed to the thinnest skin on my body. My breath caught. My pulse stumbled. I dropped the towel. Faint silver-blue lines were etching themselves along my inner wrist.

Two crescent moons, waxing and waning, interlocking like clasped fingers. The mark pulsed with a rhythm that wasn't mine. Slower. Steadier. A heartbeat I recognized without ever having heard it at that distance before. Cole's heartbeat. Threading through my skin like a needle pulling silver wire. Which meant his mark was forming too. Wherever he was in the compound, whatever he was doing, the bond had decided that three weeks of avoidance didn't constitute a refusal. Acknowledgment, the old stories said, didn't require a declaration. Just two wolves, both knowing. Both failing to unknow it.

20 1/13 T ||| O < Chapter 2 vion, Apr My stomach tightened like a fist around nothing. I pulled my sleeve down and finished folding the towels. A year is a long time to carry someone's heartbeat in your wrist. Three hundred and sixty-five days. I learned the rhythms of Cole Varen's body the way you learn the sounds of a house you live in. 62 The slight acceleration when he trained in the yard below my window. The steady thrum when he slept. The hard stutter on the two occasions I turned a corner and found him already there, six feet away, before either of us could reroute.

His pulse would spike and mine would answer. We'd stand in whatever hallway or doorway or stretch of frozen path we'd stumbled into, caught in the feedback loop of two heartbeats trying to synchronize through skin and air and the entire weight of a pack's expectations. He never spoke to me. Not once. Not about the mark, not about the resonance, not about the night on the ridge when his wolf had reached for mine with a force that had nothing to do with choice. He rerouted his patrol schedule so we wouldn't cross paths on the perimeter. He sat at the far end of the communal table.

He trained with the senior wolves instead of Owen's cohort, where he used to be. A year of architecture. Careful, exhausting, total: Designed to make us into strangers who happened to share a pulse. I wore long sleeves. So did he. 2/13 O 20 T ||| < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 2 My mother noticed in April. She was helping me hang sheets on the line behind our cabin when the wind caught my cuff and she saw the edge of the mark - silver-blue and luminous against my wrist. She went so still that the sheet she was holding snapped loose and sailed across the yard.

She didn't ask whose mark it was. She didn't need to. She'd been watching Cole Varen avoid her daughter for four months with the focused attention of a woman who'd spent twenty years reading pack dynamics the way other people read weather. "How long?" was all she said. "February." She retrieved the sheet. Pinned it to the line with hands that were perfectly steady. "Does your father know?" "No." "Does Edmund?" "I don't know." She looked at me then.

What I saw in her face was not surprise or anger but a bone-deep tiredness, as though she'd been bracing for this specific catastrophe since the night my Ashvein scent had announced itself to the longhouse. She tucked a curl behind my ear. Her fingers were cold from the wind and didn't pull away. "Keep it covered," she said. 3/13 FO 20 T O < on, Apr 62 Chapter 2 So I did. And the year passed, and the mark pulsed, and Cole's heartbeat lived in my wrist like a second clock I couldn't silence. I heard Edmund's voice through the wall of Cole's study once, about four months in.

I hadn't meant to overhear. I was bringing a supply inventory to the office next door. But the walls in the compound were old timber, and Edmund's voice was built for carrying. "No allied pack will respect a leader bonded to cursed blood. It's not personal, Cole. It's politics." Cole's reply was too low to catch. Edmund's follow-up wasn't: "You end this, or I end your succession. Your choice." I stood in the hallway with my hand pressed over the rune mark and felt Cole's heartbeat spike through my own skin. Hard. Frightened. Furious. And I knew Edmund's voice would win.

Not because Cole was cruel. Because he was Edmund's creature - chosen at fifteen, groomed for Alpha, shaped by a decade of the older man's expectations. The distance between cowardice and loyalty is measured in spine. And Cole Varen had been trained to bend. Midwinter again. I was nineteen, The longhouse was dressed the same way it had been a year ago. Cedar garlands, beeswax candles, the bonfire throwing copper light against the smoke-darkened beams. Same faces. Same mead. Same roasted elk.

The same careful distance people kept around me, though by now it had solidified into 20 4/13 T ||| O < Chapter 2 something institutional, like the roped-off space around an exhibit no one wants to touch. I worked the kitchen. Easier than sitting. Elaine had taught me that conversation. - the utility of visible labor, hands too full for anyone to expect I carried platters. Refilled pitchers. Cleared plates. 62 few Owen tracked me from across the room, his green eyes checking my position every minutes the way he'd been doing since my scent had changed. Quiet and constant as a sentry.

Every time I caught his eye he gave me the same small nod. *I'm here. I see you.* It was the only warm thing in the room. Cole was at the head table with Edmund. I could feel his heartbeat in my wrist - elevated, irregular, the cardiac signature of a man winding himself toward something he'd rather die than do. He wasn't eating. Edmund's hand was on his shoulder. I couldn't tell if he was steadying him or holding him in place. The feast wound down around eleven. Wolves drifted toward the bonfire circle for the solstice stories.

I slipped out through the kitchen entrance, the same way I'd come in. The cold hit my face like a slap. Pine sap and frost and the mineral bite of the frozen river. I was halfway to our cabin when I heard him behind me. "Lena." The first time he'd said my name in a year. 20 1 T ||| O 5/13 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 2 My body recognized his voice the way it recognized his heartbeat. Instantly. Cellularly. Without permission. A hot thread pulled tight behind my sternum. My feet locked to the path. I stopped. Didn't turn around.

His shadow stretched past mine on the ground, longer because he was taller. "Lena. Please." I turned. 62 Cole Varen stood ten feet away in the dark. No coat. His breath clouded the air between us. He looked like he hadn't slept in days. Hollowed cheeks, bruised shadows under his eyes, his jaw set so tight I could see the muscle jumping even at this distance. His left sleeve was pushed up. The rune mark on his wrist was visible, silver-blue and pulsing, and the fact that he'd stopped hiding it told me everything about what was coming.

You don't bare the wound unless you're about to make a bigger one. "I can't do this," he said. Four words. No preamble. No ceremony language, no formal audience, no political phrasing rehearsed in Edmund's study. Just Cole, on a frozen path between the longhouse and my cabin, with his mark showing and his voice cracking on the third word. Nausea rose in my throat. I swallowed it back down. 20 6/13 1 T O < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MM. Chapter 2 "I know," I said. And I did.

I'd known since the hallway outside his study, since *you end this or I end your succession, your choice.* I'd known since the morning in May when he'd walked past me at the woodpile and his hands had been shaking and his heartbeat in my wrist had felt like a trapped bird throwing itself against glass. I'd known the way you know a season is ending. Not from one sign but from the accumulation of signs, every small thing leaning in the same direction until the knowing becomes less a thought than a weather condition you've been living inside for months. Cole's face broke. Not dramatically.

A fracture, not an explosion. His jaw loosened. His eyes went wet. He took a step closer and then stopped himself, his hands rising halfway toward me before dropping to his sides like weights. "Edmund -" "I know." "If it were just me - if it were only my decision -" "But it isn't." My voice was steady. I was distantly impressed by that. "It never was." 7/13 1 20 T ||| O 62 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM Chapter 2 He closed his eyes. 7 The rune mark on his wrist was still pulsing, still broadcasting his heartbeat. Fast and ragged.

Not at all like the heartbeat of a man who wanted to be doing what he was about to do. His wolf was howling. I could feel it through the bond - pressing against the inside of his skin, scrabbling for purchase, fighting what his human mind had already decided. Then he reached into his jacket. The blade was small. Ceremonial. a 62 Silver, with a dull sheen of wolfsbane coating the edge. I could smell it from ten feet away the acrid, chemical burn of it cutting through the pine-sap cold. It made my gums ache. The handle was wrapped in cloth so the metal wouldn't touch his palm.

He held it the way you hold something someone else put in your hand. Something given, not chosen. Edmund gave it to him. I knew that without being told. The way I knew the formal words had been rehearsed in Edmund's study, the way I knew the year of avoidance had been architecture, not instinct. *You know what to do.* Cole pulled back his sleeve. The rune mark blazed silver-blue on his wrist, pulsing with the heartbeat I'd carried for twelve months - his heartbeat, threaded through my skin, the rhythm I knew better than my own. His hand was shaking. He cut across the crescent moons.

The sound was small - a hiss, silver meeting skin, wolfsbane meeting blood. The mark
O O 20 8/13 1 7 ||| O 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 Chapter 2 I felt that with a clarity that was almost obscene. The animal's grief transmitted through the channel it was being ripped from. A howl with no sound. The instinct screaming *no* while the man's hand held the blade steady. His will dragged the wolf back. Back. Back. Until the channel went silent. The warmth drained. The heartbeat stopped. Not all at once. In stages, like a hand unclenching finger by finger. First the rhythm faltered. Then the heat.

— Then the presence itself the low hum of *Cole* that had lived in my wrist for twelve months-fading to static. Then to silence. Then to a cold so absolute it had weight. The interlocking crescents on my wrist rose into scar tissue. Silver. Raised. Cold. Not from words. From the double wound of blade and withdrawal. The cut alone wouldn't have done it. A blade without the wolf's intent was just a wound would have healed. But Cole had forced his wolf to participate. To pull back at the same moment the silver opened the mark. The combination was lethal to the bond. The blade opened the door.

The wolf's retreat slammed it shut. The Solvar. - it 10/13 20 20 T O < Chapter 2 Mon, Apr Silver. Permanent. Cold in a way that had texture and weight, like a ring of ice against my pulse point that would never melt. After twelve months of carrying Cole Varen's cardiac rhythm in my skin, the silence was so sudden and total that my knees buckled. I caught myself on the fence post beside the path. The wood was rough under my palm. Real. Present. 62 The only thing anchoring me to a world that had just subtracted an entire frequency from its range. Cole was staring at his own wrist.

Blood ran from the cut, dark against the fresh scar tissue, dripping onto the snow. - His mark had scarred too - split and silver and raised, the mirror of mine. But his face wasn't registering the pain or the loss. He was looking at the wound with something that resembled relief. That was the detail I would carry for years afterward. Not the blade. Not the cold. Not the sound of his wolf fighting him through the channel. The relief. He'd been so afraid of what we were that cutting it out of his own skin - forcing his own wolf to abandon something it would have died to keep - felt like mercy.

The cowardice of it hit me then. Not just the rejection. The forced withdrawal. He hadn't only severed us - he'd made his wolf an accomplice. Dragged the animal into a MO 20 11/13 O < 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 2 decision it hadn't consented to. Overrode the deepest instinct a wolf possessed, because Edmund told him to and Cole Varen had been trained to bend. His wolf would pay for that. I didn't know it yet,

standing in the snow with my knees half-buckled and my wrist screaming cold. But I felt the shape of it. The wrongness of a wolf forced against its own bond.

The biological debt that kind of violence incurs. He dropped the blade in the snow. It landed without sound, the cloth-wrapped handle half-buried in white, the wolfsbane-coated edge glinting dully in the moonlight. He stood there for a moment. His mouth opened. "Lena -" Just my name. Cracked down the middle. The start of something he couldn't finish apology, a rehearsed closing line from Edmund's script, I didn't know which. His jaw worked. Nothing else came. "Don't," I said. Quiet. Not angry. Just done. 11 He closed his mouth. Turned. Walked back toward the longhouse without looking at me.

The blade stayed in the snow. I didn't pick it up. 12/13 1 20 T O < 62) 11:46 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 2 - End of chapter - 1 LOR 20 T 13/13 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM.