

The cursed blood novel Chapter 3 - Chapter 3 (English Translation)

Chapter 3 # Chapter 3: The Weight of Staying I don't know how long I stood by the fence. Long enough for the cold to stop being about the Solvar and start being about December. Long enough for the feast noise inside the longhouse to thin as wolves headed home. Long enough for my hands to go numb. That was useful. It meant I couldn't feel the scar pulsing against my wrist, only the absence of what had pulsed there before. Owen found me. Of course Owen found me. He came down the path with his coat unzipped, moving fast. The look on his face told me he'd seen Cole come back inside alone.

He didn't ask what happened. He looked at my hand gripping the fence post. At the rigid line of my shoulders. At the sleeve that had ridden up to show the silver scar on my wrist. "Okay," he said quietly. "Okay. Come on!" He put his coat around my shoulders. Steered me home. Sat me on my bed, wrapped a blanket around me, pressed a mug of something warm into my hands. I held it without drinking. The ceramic was hot against my palms and the Solvar was cold against my wrist and my 20 1/11 O < 62 Chapter 3 body couldn't reconcile the two temperatures.

It couldn't decide whether to shiver or be still. Owen sat on the floor beside my bed, his back against the frame, his shoulder touching my knee. He didn't speak. He didn't need to. He stayed, and that was the thing. Owen always stayed. The front door opened downstairs. My father's voice, low and controlled in the way that meant he was furious. Then Edmund's, carrying even through two floors of old timber. "The boy made his choice, Ward. It's done." "It's *done*?" My father's control slipped. Something hit the table - his fist, or his open palm.

"You spent a year in his ear, Edmund, and you want to stand in my house and tell me the boy made a choice?" "Careful." Alpha authority. The weight of rank pressing down on the word. "You're speaking to your Alpha." "I'm speaking to the man who looked at my daughter's bloodline and decided she wasn't fit to stand beside his successor. Don't dress it up." Silence. Then Edmund's voice, quieter but no softer. 20 2/11 T O < 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 3 "The Circle would never have sanctioned it. You know that. An Ashvein bonded to a future Alpha?

Every pack in the territory would have challenged us." "So you taught your protege to be a coward. Congratulations." The front door opened and closed. Edmund leaving. My father's breathing was audible even from upstairs. Ragged, heavy, the sound of a man swallowing fury because there was nowhere safe to put it. Nausea climbed the back of my throat. I swallowed it down. Owen's hand found mine in the dark. He squeezed hard enough to hurt. His way of saying: *I heard it too. I'm still here.* I squeezed back. It was the first warm thing my body had felt since the blade.

62 The next three days passed in the particular silence of a house holding its breath. My father didn't rage. That was the thing. Ward Ashwood was a man built for fury - two hundred and twenty pounds of it, hands that could crack a log splitting maul in half, a voice that carried through three floors of old timber when he let it. The night of the rejection, when Edmund had stood in our kitchen and said *the boy made his choice*, my father had hit the table hard enough to leave a dent in the pine. That was rage. That was impulse.

That was a father's body doing what his rank wouldn't let him do to the Alpha standing in his house. 3/11 20 T [I] O < 62 Chapter 3 This was different. This was quiet. I noticed it on the second day. The Solvar ached against my wrist - cold, steady, a low-grade throb that spiked when I moved too fast or breathed too deep. The scar was settling into its permanent temperature the way a burn settles into a scar. My left hand tingled sometimes. The bond's residue, maybe. The ghost-frequency of a connection that had been cut but hadn't finished bleeding.

I pressed my thumb into the silver crescent moons and felt the absence of Cole's heartbeat like a missing tooth. My tongue kept returning to the gap. Probing the emptiness because the emptiness was more real than anything around it. But I wasn't dying. I wasn't planning to run. I was lying on my bed with the glow-in-the-dark stars that had stopped glowing years ago Orion with his crooked belt, the lopsided Dipper - and I was shattered, but I was *here*. The here-ness felt like something I could hold onto. However loosely. However much the holding hurt.

My mother came in once, on the second morning. She didn't speak. She set a mug of tea on the nightstand, tucked a curl behind my ear, and pressed two fingers briefly to the inside of my unscarred wrist - the pulse point, as though checking I was still running. Her fingers were warm. They didn't pull away. She left the door cracked when she went out. A small thing. A mother's signal that I wasn't sealed off yet. My throat burned. I drank the tea to keep from crying into it. 20 4/11 T ||| O Chapter 3 Mon, Apr Then I heard my father's voice downstairs. Not arguing.

Not the controlled roar he'd used on Edmund. Something worse. Low, measured, deliberate. The voice Ward Ashwood used when he'd already made a decision and was working out the logistics. The voice he used for patrol schedules and supply requisitions and the careful, methodical planning that made him the best Beta Granholt had ever had. I'd grown up hearing that voice through floorboards and closed doors. I knew its weight. I knew what it meant when it dropped to that register: not anger anymore, but architecture. I sat up in bed. My stomach dropped before I'd worked out why.

The hallway was dark. The sound carried through the old timber of the house the way it always had - muffled but legible, the consonants softened by wood and distance but the cadence unmistakable. He was in the kitchen. Talking to someone. Rowan, maybe. I caught the faint second voice, quieter, the measured tone of my uncle the way he sounded when he was being consulted on something he didn't want to advise on. I moved to the top of the stairs. Not sneaking. Just - listening.

The way I'd listened a thousand times as a child, sitting on the landing in my pajamas while the adults talked about things they thought the floorboards would keep from me. 20 5/11 T III O < 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 3 His voice dropped lower. "She flinches when she hears boots on the porch. Because she thinks it's him." A pause. His breath leveling. "He did that. I don't care about the odds." Silence. The kind that fills a room when one person has said something the other person can't argue with and doesn't want to agree with. Then my father, quieter.

The quietness was worse than the volume. "He destroyed my daughter. I'll take his title or I'll die trying." The floor was cold under my bare feet. The Solvar pulsed against my wrist - a slow, cold throb, in time with nothing. I gripped the banister and felt the wood grain press into my palm. And I understood, with the sudden, crystalline clarity of a window breaking, what I was hearing. My father was planning to challenge Edmund Hale for Alpha. Not shouting about it. Not raging in the aftermath of a public humiliation. Not swinging his fist at a table in the hot rush of a father's fury.

Planning it. Quietly. Methodically. The way Ward Ashwood planned everything - routes, contingencies, logistics. The voice I'd heard wasn't grief. It was preparation. A formal Alpha challenge. 20 T III < 7/11 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 Chapter 3 The rites were ancient, older than the longhouse, older than the pack's written records. Any ranked wolf could invoke them. You challenged. You fought. You won or you lost. And losing - against Edmund Hale, who had held the Alpha position for decades, whose wolf was faster and more powerful than any wolf in the territory - losing meant broken bones at best.

Exile, likely. Death, possibly. Edmund wouldn't hold back. He didn't hold back for anyone. 624 That was the foundation of his authority: the absolute certainty that challenging him was the same as volunteering to be destroyed. Ward had put his fist through the kitchen wall the morning after the Solvar. Plaster and bone. Edmund had heard about it by noon and let it pass a grieving father, a closed door, no witnesses, not worth naming. But a formal challenge was different. - A formal challenge was premeditated. Filed with witnesses. Fought under rites that had no mercy clause.

And my father - careful, steady, two-hundred-and-twenty-pound anchor of my entire life was sitting in the kitchen with his brother, talking about it the way you talk about a supply run. Dates. Witnesses. Procedure. He would lose. The certainty of it settled in my chest like a stone. My breath went shallow around it. Ward Ashwood was strong, disciplined, the best Beta Granholt had, and none of it would matter against Edmund in a challenge circle. 20 O III 8/11 Chapter 3 Edmund had thirty years of Alpha power behind him.

The wolf-authority alone would be enough to press Ward to the ground before the fight began. My father would walk into that circle and he would not walk out the same man. The most probable outcome was that he wouldn't walk out at all. Because of me. Because Cole Varen had cut across his own rune mark on Edmund's orders. Because the silver scar on my wrist was proof of what they'd done to me. Because my father was

the kind of man who could not look at that proof every day and do nothing. The rejection had been the spark.

My continued presence - visible, scarred, flinching at boots on the porch 11 was the fuel. As long as I was here, Ward Ashwood would look at his daughter and see the thing Edmund had done to her. The fury would build. The planning would continue. Eventually he would file that challenge and step into a circle he was not coming out of. I sat on the top stair. The cold crept up through the floorboards into the backs of my thighs. The Solvar pulsed against my wrist, and beneath the cold there was a faint, irregular shudder. A ghost-rhythm. The last frequency of a dead bond still fading.

My left hand tingled. I pressed it against my knee and held it there. Downstairs, Rowan was speaking - low, urgent, the tone of a man trying to talk his brother off a ledge. My father's responses were short. Certain. The cadence of a decision already made. I understood then. 20 < 9/11 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 3 Not gradually, not the way understanding usually arrives the slow erosion of one certainty by another. This was instant. A single, clean fracture. If I stayed, my father would challenge Edmund. If my father challenged Edmund, my father would die.

-- in layers, in accumulations, in The logic was simple. The math was brutal. The only variable I could change was the first one. If I was gone, there was nothing to fight for. Ward wouldn't throw his life away for a daughter who wasn't there. The fury needed a catalyst to sustain it. It needed to see me every morning at the kitchen table. Needed to see the long sleeves. The careful way I held my wrist. The flinch I couldn't control when someone walked too heavily on the porch. Remove the catalyst, and the fury would have nowhere to go. It would calcify into grief, and grief was survivable.

Grief didn't end with my father bleeding out in a challenge circle. My father loved me enough to die for me. I loved him enough to disappear so he didn't have to. The Solvar pulsed. The house settled around me, creaking in the cold the way old timber - does the sound of a structure holding, holding, holding against the weight of the winter pressing down on it. Downstairs, Rowan's voice dropped below the register I could catch. My father's chair P 20 10/11 T ||| O < 62 62 Chapter 3 creaked as he shifted.

The conversation continued in the low, practical tones of two men discussing something they both knew was coming. I pressed my thumb into the scar on my wrist. The silver was ice. The crescent moons were permanent. The decision forming in my chest was not about survival. Not about biology. Not about the Solvar or the bond or the ghost-rhythm fading in my veins. It was about a man in a kitchen, planning to die for his daughter. And a daughter on the stairs, deciding to leave so he wouldn't have to. - End of chapter - 1 L < 11/11 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. admin

