

The cursed blood novel Chapter 4 - Chapter 4 (English Translation)

Chapter 4 62 Chapter 4 #Chapter 4: Gone by Morning The house was quiet in the way that only houses with sleeping people are quiet. Not silent. Layered. Breathing and settling and small unconscious sounds that mean everyone has stopped performing for the day. My parents' light had gone out at eleven. My father's breathing shifted to the deep, rhythmic pattern of sleep within twenty minutes. Ward Ashwood slept the way he did everything else - thoroughly and without apology. My mother took longer. I heard her get up once for water.

The soft pad of her feet in the kitchen, the tap running and stopping. Then nothing. Owen wasn't home. He'd left that morning for a border patrol with the eastern sentries three days, maybe four, checking the boundary markers along the ridge where Granholt territory met unclaimed forest. -- Keira had gone to her mother's cabin for the duration. The house was emptier than it had been in weeks. I'd noticed it the way you notice a door left unlocked. Not with relief, exactly, but with the particular awareness of someone who has been waiting for an opening. I hadn't planned it this way.

20 20 T 111 O 1/11 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 4 Owen's patrol schedule was posted on the longhouse board. I'd seen it two days ago and felt something shift in my chest. Not decision, not yet. The removal of an obstacle. The removal of the one person who would have seen through any lie I told. - with that I was Owen would have read the set of my shoulders or the scent of my intent, and known the infuriating accuracy of a brother who had been studying me since birth about to do something irreversible. Tonight he was forty miles east, sleeping in a patrol tent with three other wolves.

He wouldn't know until the postcard arrived. Months from now. Maybe longer. I sat on the floor of my bedroom and pressed my thumb into the Solvar. The cold was deep tonight. Not the surface chill of the first weeks - something structural, settled into the bone like frost in old timber. Beneath it, a faint ghost-rhythm I couldn't quite name. The last static of a dead channel. My left hand tingled. The scar ached. But I wasn't leaving because of the scar. Two hours ago, my father had been in the kitchen with Rowan.

I'll take his title or I'll die trying. The words lived in my chest like a splinter. Small. Sharp. Impossible to extract without tearing something. Ward Ashwood, who had never in his life made a decision he couldn't defend with logic and precedent, was planning to walk into a challenge circle against an Alpha who would break him. 2/11 T ||| O 62 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 4 Because of me. Because his daughter was upstairs with a silver scar on her wrist and a flinch she couldn't control. Because Ward could not look at that every day and do nothing.

If I was here in the morning, the planning would continue. If the planning continued, the challenge would be filed. If the challenge was filed, my father would fight. If my father fought Edmund Hale, my father would die. The logic was a straight line. The only bend I

could put in it was at the beginning. I stood up. My knees locked for a second, then caught. My stomach was a tight fist beneath my ribs. 64 No bag. That was the first decision, and it changed everything after it. A bag meant a plan. A plan meant I could be talked out of it.

The distance between this moment and the moment I lost my nerve was exactly the length of time it would take to fold a shirt. I shoved my wallet in my back pocket. Phone in the front. Pulled on boots, laced them tight, zipped my jacket to the throat. The emergency cash in the mudroom lockbox - I took three hundred of the five hundred. Taking all of it was theft. Taking none of it was performance. 20 3/11 T O 11:47 Chapter 4 Mon, Apr 20 M 62 I left my keys on the hook. Left my truck in the drive. Left everything that could be traced or tracked or used to narrow a search radius.

I stopped at my desk. The letter sat in my mind like a stone I couldn't swallow. Three drafts over the past two days, written and destroyed. The first too long. The second too honest. I couldn't sit at this desk again and compose my own disappearance in neat handwriting while the ink blurred because I was crying. Instead, I opened the shallow drawer where my mother kept a paring knife for cutting twine around bundles of dried herbs. The blade was small and sharp and familiar. I'd watched her use it a thousand times. Scoring stems. Splitting vanilla pods. Peeling labels off jam jars.

I pressed the point into the doorframe of my bedroom. Soft pine, old growth, the same wood that built the house. The knife bit in easily. I carved five words, small and deep, just below the height marker my father had penciled when I was twelve. *Not your fault. I'm sorry.* Five words. Not enough. Not the right ones. But the right ones didn't exist. These were at least true. They were cut into the bones of the house, and they wouldn't blow away or get lost or end up in a drawer. Someday my mother would find them. Touch the grooves with her fingers.

Know that I'd stood here with a knife and thought of her. D 1 4/11 Chapter 4 My throat closed so hard I had to press my forehead to the doorframe until it passed. I folded the blade closed and left it on my desk. Pulled on my gloves. Turned off the light. The hallway was dark. I moved through it the way I'd moved through it at fourteen, sneaking out to meet Hazel for bonfires - left side of the stairs, deadbolt turned while lifting the handle. The house's secret language. Its creaks and groans and tells.

All the small mechanical intimacies you learn when you've lived somewhere your entire life and loved it enough to memorize its weaknesses. The night was clear and annihilating. January in the North Cascades. The kind of cold that doesn't bother with wind, just presses down on the valley like a palm flattening dough. The cold hit my sinuses first and then the back of my throat. My breath plumed white. The truck sat on the gravel pad, frosted and silent. I walked past it without looking. At the treeline I stopped. Stripped.

Folded my clothes into a tight bundle with the wallet and phone wrapped in the center. Sealed the whole thing in the waterproof stuff sack I'd grabbed from the mudroom hooks

- the one Owen used for river crossings. I bit down on the drawcord, holding the bundle in my teeth. Then I shifted. The cold vanished. 20 L 5/11 O < 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM Chapter 4 My wolf's coat was thick, winter-dense. The January air that had been knifing through my jacket became a pressure I could lean into.

My paws found the frozen ground and the world reorganized itself - scent-layered, sound-mapped, the forest a living architecture of information my human brain could only approximate. The Solvar was quieter in this form. Not gone. Never gone. Muted, the way a headache becomes background noise when you start running. Beneath it, the faint ghost-rhythm. Some last echo of the bond's dead channel, dimming with distance. My wolf's simpler mind processed it as noise rather than navigation. She knew it was there. She didn't follow it the way I did.

She was simpler than I was, and tonight I needed simple. I ran south. Through the spruce stands. Through the creek beds frozen solid enough to cross at speed. Through clearings where the moonlight lay on the snow like something spilled. I carried the bundle in my jaws and I did not look back. Not at the house where my parents slept. Not at the warm amber windows of the compound where Cole was maybe lying awake with his own version of a body failing him. Not at any of it. The forest took me in without comment. Trees don't judge bloodlines. Snow doesn't flinch from the wrong scent.

My wolf ran and the miles stacked up behind me. Each one was a small, irreversible severing 6/11 62 Mon, Apr 20 Chapter 4 M 62 not the bond, which was already dead, but the thousand smaller ties that connected me to a place I couldn't stay. Owen's cedar scent. My father's pencil marks on the doorframe. My mother's hands on the cutting board, steady as always, holding the question *how far* in her mouth like something she needed to swallow before she could breathe. The muscles in my shoulders began to burn. I leaned into it. The burn was cleaner than the cold in my wrist.

It was a pain my body had earned by moving, and moving was the only thing keeping the grief from catching me. At thirty miles, the ghost-rhythm faltered. Not stopped. Dimmed. Like a radio signal losing its tower. A faint easing in the Solvar's cold, the ache thinning from a pressure to a hum. I hadn't been running from the bond. But the bond noticed I was leaving. At fifty miles, the rhythm vanished. I stopped in a clearing and stood in the moonlight and felt the absence of it. The last static of the dead channel, gone quiet. The Solvar was still cold. It would always be cold.

But it was a simpler cold now. The cold of scar tissue rather than the cold of something still reaching. A background fact instead of a live wire. My wolf lifted her head and breathed deep. 1 7/11 Chapter 4 Clean air. Pine and ice and distance. No pack markers. No claims. No history. Just the forest and the cold and a wolf standing alone in the space between her father's life and her own disappearance. Her ribs heaved. My tongue was hot in my jaw, my legs trembling from the distance. I was hungrier than I'd been in my life. And something under the grief loosened. Just a little.

Just enough to name. *He's still alive. He's still alive because you went.* It wasn't triumph. It wasn't hope. It was the first ember of something I hadn't earned and didn't deserve. I ran on. I ran until the forest thinned and the mountains began to flatten into foothills. Until the scent of pack territory faded behind me and the air turned neutral. No markers. No claims. No history. Just pine and ice and distance. Dawn found me at the edge of a two-lane highway, six miles north of a town whose name I didn't know. I shifted back behind a stand of birch. Dressed with numb fingers.

My hands shook so hard I caught the zipper on my glove twice before it took. A gas station sat at the treeline with a Greyhound sign hung crooked in the window. The woman behind the counter didn't look up from her phone. "Next bus south?" "Six-forty. Wenatchee." 1 O 8/11 Apr Chapter 4 "How much?" 62 "Twenty-two." I paid in cash. Sat on the bench outside with my hands in my pockets and the stuff sack between my boots, and watched the sky lighten from black to grey to the pale, washed-out blue of a winter morning that had nothing in it for me. The Solvar pulsed against my wrist.

The cold was simpler now, away from pack territory. Cleaner. The scar of something that had happened, not the conduit of something still happening. My stomach growled once. I pressed my forearm against it and waited for the cramp to pass. When the bus came, I climbed on and took a seat in the back and pressed my forehead against the window. The glass was freezing. 17 My breath fogged it. Through the fog I watched the mountains recede not dramatically, not in a cinematic sweep. Slowly. Tree by tree. Mile by mile. The way you lose something you love.

Gradually, then all at once, then just gradually again for a very long time. I was not brave. I was not making a statement. I was a nineteen-year-old girl with a scar on her wrist and three hundred dollars in her jacket and a bundle of clothes on the seat beside her. Sitting on a Greyhound bus in January. Heading south because south was the direction that kept her father alive. 9/11 T O < 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 000 M. The bus pulled onto the highway. The mountains fell behind me. The Solvar pulsed. Five words cut into a doorframe. That was all I left.

G That, and the shape of myself in the rooms I'd emptied. The silence my family would wake to. And the knowledge- mine alone, carried in the numb fingers of my left hand and the dormant channel in my wrist- that leaving wasn't flight. It was triage. Owen would come home from patrol in three days. He would find my room empty. The bed unslept in. The doorframe carved. He would stand in the hallway and stare at the five words. And his mind would build a framework for what had happened - a story that made sense. A narrative he could investigate and challenge and fight.

He wouldn't have the right story. He'd have the one that looked like shame and running. Not the one that looked like a girl who heard her father planning to die for her and decided to remove the reason. I would write to him. Not today, not tomorrow, but eventually. A postcard from somewhere far enough away that the postmark wouldn't lead him here. Six words: *I'm alive. I'm working. Don't come looking.* Not enough. Not the right words.

But the right words would bring him to wherever I was, and his presence would mean questions, and questions would mean answers, and answers would mean Owen building a case to bring me home. הווה 10/11 ןןן O 11:47 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. Chapter 4

And home was the one place my father couldn't survive me being. The bus hummed beneath me. The highway stretched south. My left hand flexed and closed and flexed again. Feeling returning to the fingers for the first time in weeks.

62 Each small sensation 11 the rough fabric of the seat, the cold glass against my temple, the crinkle of cash in my jacket pocket - was proof that the distance was real. That the choice I'd made in the dark of my bedroom was holding. That every mile between me and Granholt was a mile my father couldn't cross to reach a challenge circle. The mountains disappeared behind me. The Solvar pulsed, steady and cold and finally, mercifully, quiet. - End of chapter - 11/11 11:48 Mon, Apr 20 MMM. admin