



# YOUR BLOOD, MY BONES

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SCHOLASTIC PRESS/NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-88507-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

24 25 26 27 28

Printed in Italy

183

First edition, April 2024

Book design by Maeve Norton

# 1

## WYATT

She meant to burn it down. The house, with its pitched gables and chipped paint, leaded windows glazed in yellow glass. The roof was leaved in curling gray shingles, the undersides fringed in moss, and there was something undeniably morose about it—the way it sagged, the way the wrought iron parapets of the widow’s watch had gone red with rust.

She stood at the edge of the flagstone walk, hemmed in by a meadow of fat purple coneflowers, and gripped a red jerrican in her left hand. In her right, she clutched a thin paperboard matchbook. She thought about dousing the porch in gasoline. She thought about enjoying one last sit on the weathered swing.

And then she thought about setting it aflame.

About the way it would feel to watch her ghosts go up in smoke.

Memory was a fickle thing. She’d remembered her father’s house as white. Instead, she’d been surprised to find the wraparound porch done in a splintering evergreen trim, the broad-paneled siding a dull infection-colored yellow. The last time she’d seen it, it had been through the rearview window of her mother’s rusted Ford. Her backpack sat on the seat beside her, stuffed full of books. Her Maine coon cat, Slightly, was clutched in her arms and she’d been openly weeping. On the porch, her father grew smaller and smaller.

*"She'll find her way back,"* he'd bellowed.

And she had.

Her father's death had come as a surprise. It wasn't that they'd been close—they hadn't. He sent her letters on Christmas, which she dutifully ignored. He sent her gifts on her birthday, which she passed off to her cousin. She didn't write back. She didn't return his calls. It still felt like a rug had been pulled out from underneath her the day she received the news of his passing.

*"He didn't want you to know he was ill,"* Joseph Campbell said, framed in the open door of her aunt's apartment, his coat wet from the April rain. The last time she'd seen her father's right-hand man, he'd been restraining his son James, his hands tacky with blood and his face contorted into rage. Now those same hands spun and spun a flat herringbone cap. He looked startlingly contrite. *"He wanted you to remember him the way he was."*

*"Estranged?"* Wyatt's grip on the door had begun to hurt.

*"Robust,"* Joseph corrected, his mouth twitching into a frown. *"Strong. Dedicated. A proper steward of Willow Heath."*

A steward. It was a funny word to describe Wyatt's father. She'd had plenty of words to define him, back when she still lived at the farm. A steward wasn't one of them. He'd been a botanist, locked in his greenhouse with his eclectic collection of plant life—a naturalist, his attic full of taxidermized quadrupeds and antler sheds, a curio cabinet he kept locked tight as a drum.

A ghost, too swallowed up in his passions to take notice of the child floundering in his care. His letters and his gifts had come too late. Postmarked with regrets she didn't care to receive. Sealed with apologies she didn't have the space to break open.

*“As you know,”* Joseph told her, oblivious to the way her thoughts spun out like a top, *“your father was my oldest and dearest friend. He appointed me executor of his estate just after receiving his diagnosis. It was his dying wish that the Westlock family farm should go to you. The last living Westlock.”*

Standing on the front walk, Wyatt could just see the mist rising off the meadows in curls of gray. Beyond that, the first shingled rooftop of a clapboard cottage poked its dormered head over the rise. If she closed her eyes, she could still picture the fields beyond—the half-dozen outbuildings baked into the creases of Willow Heath’s sixty-five considerable acres. Once livestock shelters and poultry coops, the buildings had long since been remodeled into modest lodgings for her father’s revolving door of summertime callers.

And now they were hers.

She wondered if they’d burn, too. Hot and bright, like kindling.

*“They come for the summit,”* her mother told her, when she’d grown old enough to dig into her father’s mysterious circle of guests. *“Try and stay out of their way, if you can help it. They’ll be gone by summer’s end.”*

At seven years old, Wyatt had no idea what made up a summit. She only knew what it meant to her. It meant roomfuls of strangers who went quiet whenever she entered. It meant the stink of incense clinging to everything she owned. It meant lanterns in the field after dark, the Gregorian cadence of chanting in the dawn.

But more than anything, it meant Peter and James.

For nearly as long as Wyatt could remember, her summers at Willow Heath had included the two of them. Each autumn she was shipped off to boarding school, kicking and screaming in her plaid

skirts and her Mary Janes. Each spring she returned and found James and Peter there waiting, bored out of their skulls and stalking cotton-tails behind the rusted silo. Where to Wyatt, Willow Heath was home, to James and Peter, it was a sort of bucolic prison—an eight-week sentence they were forced to carry out while their guardians convened in secret alongside Wyatt's father.

Gangling and barefoot and a little bit feral, Peter had been the sort of boy who always looked hungry. He'd had a stare like ice, a shock of white hair that stuck up every which way. Where Wyatt was an open book—eager to spill her innermost thoughts to whoever or whatever was willing to listen—Peter had been infuriatingly tight-lipped. As such, Wyatt had never quite managed to puzzle out who he belonged to. Their first few summers together, she'd peppered him with an endless barrage of questions—*Are you here with your dad? An uncle? Where do you go to school? Did you take the train? Which cottage are you staying in?*—until he became so fed up with her interrogation, he began avoiding her altogether. After that, she'd stopped asking. She let him remain a mystery, so long as he was her mystery to keep.

James Campbell, older than the two of them by a year, had been every bit Peter's opposite. Cunning, where Peter was guileless. Chatty, where Peter was withdrawn. Charming, where Peter was wild. He wore his dark hair cropped short, preferring to dress according to the stringent codes of his stuffy English boarding school, even when no one required it of him.

A budding renegade and a reckless thief, James arrived each summer with yet another expulsion under his belt, his suitcase stuffed full of stolen things—an old Polaroid camera, a silver butane lighter, an exported pack of cigars he'd pilfered from his headmaster's office. The

three of them would tuck away their treasure in the barn's termite-eaten loft and cuff the legs of their pants, spending the rest of their day catching frogs in the reeded shallows of the millpond.

They hadn't been friends. Not in the usual sense of the word, and certainly not at the start. Wyatt had often thought that if the three of them had gone to the same school, they likely would have gone out of their way to avoid crossing paths. She'd have her circle, and they'd have theirs, and that would be that.

But at Willow Heath, all they'd had was one another.

That wasn't to say they'd gotten along. Far from it. Their days back then were filled with petty squabbles and ceaseless bickering, their elaborate war games often coming to very real blows. James—the schemer of the group—had kept the trio plenty busy, doling out daily expeditions with all the confidence of a prince. Eager to avoid the droves of adults, they'd stuff their pockets full of breakfast biscuits and hike out to the farthest reaches of the farm, spending their mornings climbing into trees to look for birds' nests, their afternoons collecting snakeskin sheds from the stony northern ridge. They'd dreamed together. They'd fought together. And eventually—reluctantly—they'd grown together.

The rattle caw of a crow dragged Wyatt back into the present and the task at hand. Match. Accelerant. Flame. Her childhood in smoke. She didn't want to think about Peter and James. Not standing in the shadow of her father's house with a drumful of gasoline and a vendetta. Not with the memory of her final night at the farm burned into her brain like a brand.

All these years later, and she could still picture it so clearly: Peter

on his knees, his eyes shining red and unrepentant in the eclipse-dark. James, spitting blood, the collar of his shirt clutched in his father's fist. She couldn't help but wonder what she'd find, if she were to hike out to the old wooden chapel where she'd seen them last. Would there be remnants of their final, brutal moments together? Or had it all been scrubbed away?

Once, the chilly chantry had been their hideaway. Their sanctuary and their home base. It sat out on the northernmost acreage, tucked away in a grove of dying pine. Its western face was bordered in a graveyard of crumbling headstones, its steeple crusted blue with lichen, and they'd loved it because it was theirs—a sole pocket of solace in their fathers' busy, secret world. Oftentimes, when the days wore on and the heat became insufferable, they'd stow away in the shadowed ambulatory and hold court. Wyatt would climb onto the empty altar and claim it as her throne, spending the endless afternoons doling out crusades to her dutiful knights.

And there they were again, persistent as hornets—Peter and James, the memory of them sharp as a sting. She hadn't spoken to either of them in five long years. Not since her father dragged her from the chapel, the echo of his disdain pinging off the trees: *"This has gone quite far enough."*

As hard as she'd worked to forget that night, she still remembered the way James had bellowed after them, railing against his father's restraints. She remembered Peter's silence, the feel of his stare prickling the back of her neck. And beneath it—buried deeper still—she remembered the funny pulsing in her veins. The sliding and slipping of something dark and formidable in her belly.

Her mother had packed Wyatt's bags the very next morning. She'd

been loaded into the car like luggage and shipped to her aunt's apartment in Salem. Neither Peter nor James had come to say goodbye.

For months, she'd waited. For a call. For a text. For an encoded letter.

But all she'd gotten was silence.

All Willow Heath had ever brought her was a bellyful of grief—a headful of questions without answers. The sooner she could burn this place to the ground, the better.

And yet, when she crossed over the threshold and into the house, it wasn't with a lit match. Instead, she was drawn toward the white doorframe where her mother had tracked her yearly growth in neat pencil notations. Peter's were knifed in like an afterthought, towering over her more and more as the summers trickled past. Every now and again, there was James, his Catholic name penned in a private-school longhand.

The feel in her chest was that of stitches ripped clean. There, beneath her bones, was a wound she thought she'd healed. Raw and weeping as the day she'd received it. She breathed in deep. It put a prickle in the back of her throat. When she blinked, her lashes came away wet.

She'd learned, in the past year, that no good could come of tears. And so, she didn't let them fall. Readjusting the canister, she continued on. This wasn't a walk down memory lane—it was a mission. A final crusade. She moved through the house room by room, kicking up dust as she went.

By the time she reached her old bedroom, there was a saltwater sting in her throat that wouldn't abate. She stood in the silence and breathed in the mothball camphor of her childhood room. Flooded

with lace and taffeta and frumpy, faded florals, the entire space was a colorful, cluttered mess. The window seat was stuffed with animals, the bedspread hand-quilted from scraps of her baby clothes, and it would have looked exactly as she'd remembered it if it hadn't been good and thoroughly ransacked.

It took her a beat to understand what she was seeing. Someone had shattered the mirror on her vanity, and broken glass glimmered like diamonds on the rug. The dresser drawers sat askew, and her jewelry box had been upended, hinges split and wind-up ballerina contorted on her spring. Several bits of old costume jewelry sat strewn about the room in a wild scattering of beads.

She might have felt violated, had she left anything of value behind. But she hadn't. She'd scraped up every last piece of herself and gone. Whatever the intruder had been looking for, they were welcome to it. Stepping inside, she plucked the jewelry box off the floor and set it atop the pillaged dresser. The ballerina listed hopelessly to the left.

An eddy of wind swirled through the room, and Wyatt glanced up to find the window ajar, the old willow outside her bedroom dripping with yellow springtime catkins. The sight of it brought forth another unwanted memory—deep summer, an eleven-year-old James scaling the branches under cover of dark.

*"My father's downstairs with the rest of them,"* he'd said, climbing into bed beside her. *"What do you think they're doing?"*

*"Sacrificing a lamb, probably,"* Wyatt returned. *"Eating small children."*

They'd loved to wonder—to theorize about what their fathers did, cloaked and secretive and chanting in the meadows.

*"I think it has to do with Peter,"* James said, rolling on his side to face

her. His eyes had been the color of deep midnight, starlit and secretive, and he always talked like he knew more than he was letting on. *"I heard them whispering about him yesterday."*

*"That's stupid,"* Wyatt said. *"Nobody is interested in Peter but us."*

The boy in question had appeared not long after, crawling in through the window as a pale dawn bled into the horizon. Wyatt lifted her quilt, half-asleep and shivering as a cool crest of nighttime air slipped beneath the covers.

*"You would tell me, right?"* she'd asked as they lay nose to nose in the dark. *"If someone was hurting you?"*

But Peter hadn't answered. He'd already drifted asleep.

When she pulled her bedroom door shut, the click of it reverberated through the empty house like a gunshot. Her stomach sat in a tight coil, her nerves knotting along her veins. She hadn't invited it—this unearthing of things she'd meant to leave buried. She hadn't come back to visit with her ghosts—she'd come to set them alight.

As she made her way back downstairs, she paused.

She'd heard it. She was sure of it. One moment the house had been silent as a tomb, and the next she'd heard her name, drifting up from the cellar. Across the hall, the door to the stairs sat open. She moved toward it with caution, gas canister in hand, her heart skipping every other beat.

"Hello," she called. "Is someone there?"

When no one answered, she went down. The cellar was long and low, the poured concrete spiderwebbed in cracks. A chill clung to the air, and the feel of it pebbled her skin.

The very first thing she noticed were the roots. It looked as though the white willow outside her bedroom had launched an assault of its

own, wooded extremities wending through wide cracks in the foundation. Smaller feeders crept along the wall in a thinning network of veins. They looked as though they'd been pruned into shape the way an arborist trained ivy through a pergola. Only, instead of wooden lattice, the ropy tubers had been carefully braided through a pair of fat iron chains someone had bolted to the ceiling.

And there, suspended in the shackles, was the second thing she noticed:

Peter. Not a boy anymore, the way she remembered him, but grown.

He hung slack in the chains, his arms bracketed overhead, his lean frame pale as marble. The white mess of his hair curtained his brow, and he was bare save for a pair of trousers and a round pendant strung on a thick leather cord.

A sharp spate of horror twisted up and through her. Her vendetta momentarily forgotten, the canister slammed to the ground at her feet. Peter's chin drew up at the sound, and she was met with a stare the color of liquid silver. A stare she'd done everything she could to leave behind.

He didn't look afraid to be there, gaunt and starving and half-swallowed in roots. He didn't look relieved to see her. Instead, his dark brows tented. The corners of his bloodless mouth turned down in an imperious frown.

"You finally came home," he said, and he sounded impatient. "It's about time."