



YOUR BLOOD, MY BONES

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YOUR BLOOD,
MY BONES

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**FOR ANYONE WHO HAS EVER LEFT A PART
OF THEMSELVES BEHIND.**

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Part One: The Homecoming](#)

[Chapter 1: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 2: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 3: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 4: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 5: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 6: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 7: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 8: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 9: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 10: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 11: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 12: Wyatt](#)

[Part Two: The Stranger](#)

[Chapter 13: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 14: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 15: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 16: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 17: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 18: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 19: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 20: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 21: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 22: Wyatt](#)

[Part Three: The Solstice](#)

[Chapter 23: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 24: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 25: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 26: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 27: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 28: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 29: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 30: Pedyr](#)

[Chapter 31: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 32: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 33: James](#)

[Chapter 34: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 35: Wyatt](#)

[Chapter 36: Wyatt](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright](#)

PART ONE

THE HOMECOMING

I had liefer to die with honour than to live with shame;
and if it were possible for me to die a hundred times,
I had liefer to die so oft than yield me to thee.

Le Morte d'Arthur, Thomas Malory

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 cottontails 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."

2

PEDYR

No one remembered Pedyr Criafol's name.

His anonymity was an accident. He'd spent so long saying so little—tucking his secrets into his cheek like sugar candies—that when he finally went looking for them, they were gone. By that time, there'd been no one alive who remembered who he'd been before he came to Willow Heath.

It was an unfortunate side effect of immortality.

It wasn't that Pedyr couldn't die. He was, as a whole, extremely good at dying. It was only that he couldn't seem to stay dead. It didn't matter how he went—if it was quick and painless or slow and excruciating. Each time it happened, he was struck down and buried deep, his body fed to the lifeless grove out back. The following dawn would find him cradled in the shallow roots of a towering pine. Not a little boy anymore, begging and pleading, but pink and keening as a newborn.

And no one knew why.

"Death-defying," said the Westlocks, when he'd first stumbled into their care. *"A medical marvel! An oddity! A paradigm!"* Men of science and thaumaturgy alike gathered in droves to poke at him with lancets and knives. They slathered his cells on strips of glass and studied him beneath a microscope. They dissected him like a frog.

They killed him in increasingly imaginative ways, until he learned to bear it all without so much as a whimper. He didn't carry much with him from life

to life, but at least he always managed to remember how to die with decorum. It was inborn, he supposed—the way domesticated dogs still buried bones in winter, or the way crows remembered faces across generations.

He had, lying dormant within him, a primal instinct that made him extremely adept at suffering in silence.

And he'd suffered Wyatt Westlock for thirteen long summers.

He couldn't remember meeting her, only that she'd always been there this particular lifetime—loud and volatile and prone to fits that left him covering his ears, running for the hills fast enough to set the deer in flight.

He couldn't remember meeting James Campbell, either, only that he always accompanied his father to Willow Heath in the summer and he always, *always* brought pocketsful of candies. Toffees and Maltesers, paper bags stuffed with jelly babies and bars of half-melted chocolates. They'd sit out in the twilight meadow, a jar of fireflies winking gold between them, and eat until their teeth were furred and their stomachs hurt.

"Don't save any for Wyatt," James would say. *"She's been a brat all day."*

By then, Pedyr had lived so long that he'd already begun to forget the taste of death. Wyatt Westlock's father had come back from the city with a college degree and a pregnant wife and a contemporary outlook on ritual sacrifice. His very first decree as steward of Willow Heath was to call an end to the centuries-long practice.

"It's barbaric," Pedyr once heard him tell Wyatt's mother. He'd been stuffed in the kitchen cupboards, watching them have their morning coffee. In his fist, the biscuit he'd pilfered from the pantry had begun to crumble. *"Irremissible, the way things have been done around here. I've spent my entire life watching these foolish old men harvest that boy year after year. And for what?"*

"Necessity makes monsters out of men," came the mother's careful reply. *"You know better than anyone what's waiting out there in the forest."*

"There must be a better way," said the father. *"He's just a child."*

“For now.” A spoon clinked against the lip of a mug. *“But he’ll grow, if you let him. I only wonder what a boy like that will grow into, after so many lifetimes of torment.”*

Though the killings had stopped by then, the excruciating pain of the ceremony remained. One midnight a summer, Pedyr still drew every eye in Willow Heath. Watched by the Westlock patriarch’s handpicked inner circle, he became Pedyr the deathless: a living icon and a modern miracle. He’d lie bleeding on his altar, his flesh closing up around a knife wound, and watch as grown men fell to their knees. He’d swallow lungfuls of incense, his belly full of fire, and promise himself that one day he’d seize his chance and wriggle free.

Because, like any captive, he had an escape plan.

And Wyatt Westlock was the key.

She looked different than he remembered. When she’d left, she’d been willowy and restless, her face kissed in freckles—crawling out of her skin, the way Pedyr crawled out of his. Now, framed by the root-riven concrete, she stood perfectly still. Her hazel eyes were wide and bright, her hair unbound in a loose strawberry spill, and she looked both intensely familiar and entirely new.

“Peter? Holy shit.”

And then, there she was in front of him—her touch like lit cinders on his throat. Clumsy fingers fumbled against his carotid, feeling for the thready pulse flickering beneath his skin.

“Peter,” she said again, more forcefully this time than before. *“Peter, can you hear me?”*

She ducked into his line of sight and he was met with her piercing stare—a stare he’d spent thirteen turbulent years trying his level best not to commit to memory.

Because the thing of it was, Pedyr had never wanted Wyatt Westlock for a friend.

He wanted her dead.

“*God.*” She was babbling now, panic sapping the color from her cheeks. “Are you okay? Don’t answer that—of course you’re not okay. That was a stupid question, forget I asked. Should I call the police? A-an ambulance?”

She fished her phone out of the pocket of her pants, her feet scuffing concrete as she fell to pacing. Back and forth, forth and back, rambling as she went.

“Come *on*. I have no service. Are you *kidding me*?” She drew to a stop and peered round the dark, her gaze cutting intermittently to his. “Where are the keys? There’s got to be keys. They’d have to be close by, right?”

At this proximity he could see her pulse hammering in the triangle of her throat. Westlock blood, unspilled. His way out of this endless, deathless loop, at last. It was all he’d thought about for nearly eighteen long years.

“Shit.” She speared her fingers through her hair. “James’s dad told me the house has been empty since my dad went into hospice. Why would he say that? Did he not know you were here? He told me he did a final walk-through; didn’t you call out for help?” She fell to a stop, going gimlet-eyed in the gloom. “Did he *put you down here*?”

He glowered down at her, grinding his molars hard enough to hurt. She was asking all the wrong questions, worrying about all the wrong things. They didn’t have time for an inquisition. Not with the days trickling by like water, the house dying around them.

In life, her father had been Willow Heath’s sole greenskeeper. A last stronghold against the wild forest, the farm’s perennial gardens were all that kept the stygian dark of the wood at bay. Each day since her father’s passing, the grounds had withered a little bit more. Left untended, the entirety of Willow Heath would soon be swallowed up in the hostile creep of weeds. The wards would fall, and an endless night would descend, bringing with it an army of creatures from the deep.

Pedyr didn’t want to be here when that happened, chained like a hound in the cellar. Not when he’d finally found a way out. To survive, he needed a Westlock warden to tend the gardens. To escape, he needed a Westlock heart to feed to the starveling dark. Here she was in front of him, both the prodigal

daughter and the sacrificial lamb, and he wasn't about to do or say anything that might make her run.

Not this time.

"I don't understand how you're even alive," she said, still pacing. The smell of gasoline was making him dizzy and she was babbling a mile a minute, with no concern at all for the way the sound of her voice made him want to succumb to a seething fit. "Strung up like this, I mean. What the hell was happening here?"

"Please." His throat was raw from lack of use. "Don't shout."

His head was a click-wheel spin of unasked-for memories—the crunch of gravel as she pulled out of the driveway for the very last time. The barn in flames, the dirt under his nails. The seven guildsmen strung up in white, their arms spread in thin dark crucifixes. The ceaseless susurrus of the forest, wending along his bones. Stitching itself into the space between his ears.

Coward. You let her slip through your fingers, and now we both starve.

"I can't find a key anywhere," Wyatt said, desperation crawling into her voice. "There has to be one somewhere, right?"

The irony bled through him, bitter and metallic. She was the only key in the room. "The bindings are organic," he ground out. "You'll have to let me out yourself."

Her gaze snapped to his. "And how am I supposed to do that?"

"Blood tilling. Hematic farming?" Frustration rose into his stomach when her expression stayed blank. "It's only the core tenet of the Westlock legacy, *your* legacy—what have you been doing these past five years?"

"Going to *public school*," she shot back, though he didn't miss the downward twitch in her scowl, the way her fingers snarled together. Five years away, and her tells hadn't changed. She wasn't being entirely truthful. "I've been writing papers on Jane Austen and learning about isosceles triangles. Like a normal person."

"But you're not a normal person." The words scraped out of him in a rasp. "Your father was the most sought-after environmental alchemist in