

Silver's Bane

Living DEAD
BOOK ONE

ASHLI & TRISHA
EDWARDS

*Dedicated to
Harrison Paul Fidler
June 19, 1994—January 31, 2009*

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Prologue

1598, ENGLAND

"Juliana! Come inside, Juliana!" a voice called.

"O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright," young Juliana quoted. She giggled happily and turned over on her bed of grass to take in the darkening sky.

"Juliana Elizabeth Bristow!"

"It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night. As a rich jewel on an Ethiop's ear," Juliana continued quoting her favorite play by a man named William Shakespeare. Rumor was that this playwright's words would live throughout the ages. It didn't matter if they did or not; Juliana was almost as smitten with Shakespeare as she was with her fiancé.

"Juliana, come inside this instant!"

Juliana could almost see her Aunt Millie standing in the doorway with hands on her wide-set hips. Tossing her brilliant, auburn hair over her shoulder, she made no attempt to answer or showed any signs of compliance.

Well, Romeo, you do know how to leave a girl breathless, she thought to herself. "Have not saints' lips and holy palmers too?" She let out another giggle as she said aloud. "Aye, pilgrim. Lips that they must use in prayer."

“O, dear saint let lips do what hands do,” a familiar male voice quoted from behind her.

“Laurence!” Juliana jumped up from the ground and threw her arms around the brawny man she would soon marry.

“So where is my kiss, fair maiden?” he questioned with a small smirk.

“Right here, good sir,” she whispered in his ear, batted her lashes, and planted a gentle kiss on his lips.

“Juliana!” Aunt Millie had finally reached a truly exasperated state.

“You sure do have good, old Millie vexed again tonight,” Laurence commented, holding Juliana off the ground.

“She’s always upset with me,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Come.” He swung her around in his arms. “One mustn’t keep her waiting too long.”

Juliana stuck out her lower lip in a false pout.

“Go now. It is time for you to retire,” he ordered, kissing her again. “And goodnight.” He set her gently back on her feet.

“If you insist,” she replied with a playful grimace, but her smile returned quickly. “Goodnight, until it be tomorrow!” she said, turning on her toes and starting toward the old cottage.

Juliana smiled to herself. *Oh, I love him.*

She soon approached the cottage where she had been living with her Aunt Millie for the past year. It stood alone in the darkness, positively minuscule next to the

large trees on either side. She walked into the front door, kissed her flustered aunt on the cheek, and headed up the stairs to her tiny room.

Life had been so different since her family had gone away. After their parents' deaths, Juliana had drawn her happiness from her twin. They were opposites in personality. While Juliana was quiet and reserved, like all good girls should be, her brother was known for his recklessness. It was that recklessness that had gotten him killed.

Laurence had held Juliana together throughout the traumas she had endured of late. Gradually, she had grown to love him and he her. The most joy Juliana now felt was in thoughts of the shared future that lay ahead of them. He wanted to work for the church and she wanted a family. Their dreams fit together wonderfully.

When Juliana reached her room, she did not undress. She had no intention of staying shut up in the cottage, no matter what Laurence said. She couldn't waste this perfect night. She had to enjoy the serenity of her favorite clearing in the woods. It was her secret place. No one knew of it, not even Laurence.

Impatiently, she waited in her slowly darkening bedroom. It seemed like hours before her aunt's lamp went out and the obnoxious snoring started.

The shimmy down the oak tree outside her window was a dangerous exercise but something she had done many times before. Juliana suspected Aunt Millie knew about her late-night excursions because she had started

to mutter that her brother had died and left Juliana his lack of sense.

It took her a few minutes to get her feet firmly planted on the ground. One glance up at Millie's darkened window told her that she was free. After taking a deep, calming, breath, Juliana trotted happily toward the woods.

Upon her arrival, Juliana sat on her favorite stump and drank in the sounds of the romantic forest around her. Sitting there, clutching her well-used book in her hands, she sighed. Despite all of the loss she had experienced, she found that she was at peace.

After a long while, however, Juliana yawned several wide yawns in a row and decided it was time to head back home and slip into her soft bed. She had almost reached the house when she heard a shrill, penetrating scream that made her blood run still. *Aunt Millie!* Another scream pierced the darkness. Aunt Millie was not screaming out of anger. Reality hit like a boulder to the head. *Terror!*

Juliana took off running toward the house, but before she reached her destination, the screams were suddenly silenced. Her heart skipped several beats. As she approached, everything looked dark and peaceful, but something felt wrong; unsettling. Cautiously, Juliana peered in the front door. It was propped open. Looking down, she noticed a trail of large, muddy footprints on the floor, much larger than her own.

"Hello?" she whispered into the darkness.

Crash!

What was that?

Crash. *There it is again!* The disturbance was coming from the small kitchen at the back of the cottage. Just then, she saw a blur of a dark shadow speeding toward her. Her heart pounded under her ribcage. The shadow ducked around the corner and into the study. *It's as big as a man!* Scared but curious, she followed. It was like nothing she'd ever seen before.

"Hello?" she croaked, her mouth dry.

A low, sharp snarl echoed through the room, answering her call. Horrified, she turned to run but strong arms prevented her escape. She hardly recognized her voice as her own terrified scream pierced the air. A hand clamped over her mouth. The man hissed and bent over her trembling frame. An excruciating pain issued from the base of her neck. Her breath came in rapid spurts, but she could make no sound, due to the long fingers still covering her mouth.

Jules felt herself growing weak, slipping from consciousness as her blood left her body. She slumped to the ground, but the arms cradled her as she fell. Her head lolled back, exposing her face. She heard a sharp intake of breath that wasn't hers. "He said you were beautiful." The smooth voice mused. Somewhere far away, Jules heard a ripping sound. "He was right." Something smooth and cool pressed against her lips. "Drink." The voice commanded. The warm liquid tasted of metal and burned her throat.

Jules's eyes fluttered open, she saw the blurred outline of a face. "You are mine now," it said. He released her, Jules dropped to the floor with a thump. The man,

the shadow, was gone. Jules's hand reached for her throbbing neck, she felt two small punctures in her skin. This is when the real pain started.

Chapter One

WELCOME TO ABOIT, MAINE

Over 400 Years Later, America

Juliana Bristow raced through the darkened streets. Speed was her ally, the moonlight her friend. To the human eye, she would be a blur of red and white, and still, she stuck to the shadows. The sleepy seaside town was slowly tucking itself in for late evening meals and prime time television. This was one of the reasons Jules had chosen Aboit, Maine as a home. It was quiet, it was peaceful, and it was safe. Or so was thought. In Aboit, vampires ran free. Well, three of them did.

Jules stopped abruptly and took in her surroundings. She'd taken a wrong turn. Gabriel was going to gloat if he and Eileen beat her to their destination. She thought of the smug expression that would undoubtedly appear on her best friend's face and bolted toward the center of town. Jules's run was fierce. She rounded a corner like a cheetah on the heels of its prey. Deducing a quicker route than the one she was currently following, Jules launched herself onto a nearby rooftop. She sped across it, easily making the distance. One, to the next, and then the next.

Her feet moved soundlessly over the humans' heads. Each and every one none the wiser.

Long ago, after her first taste of blood, Jules had been appalled by what she had become. But now, over four hundred years later, she had come to embrace, but control, what she was. As Jules reached the first restaurant rooftop, she stopped to take in the view around her. She could see the bustling marina clearly from her perch. The cry of seagulls rang in her ears. She took a deep, unnecessary breath. Jules loved the smell of the sea. She then peered down into the dark alley beneath her. *Empty*. She had meant to drop to the ground in silence but instead landed in a puddle with a splash.

“What was that?” someone asked.

“Probably nothing,” said another.

Jules flattened herself against the stone wall and waited until they passed. She had reached the busy downtown area. At least what the people of Aboit considered busy. This seaside haven was sparsely populated when compared to the last city she'd lived in.

Jules sighed. It couldn't be helped. She'd have to walk the rest of the way. The sweatshirt she wore concealed most of her pale, freckled skin and she pulled her blue hood up over her radiant auburn hair for good measure. Shoving her hands into her pockets, she walked briskly, but not fast enough to draw extra attention. She was drawing enough as it was. It seemed, no matter how she tried to blend into this human world, being dead made her stand out. Jules's closest human friend would say that humans looked for magic in their lives and that

Jules's unearthly beauty made her feel like magic. Jules thought it was because humans craved danger, and there was nothing more dangerous than a predator that hungered for your blood.

Jules came to an abrupt halt when she reached Henry Park. Which, in reality, was more of a bench and flowerpot in front of the public library. She sat on the weather-worn bench and waited.

"You took the rooftops, didn't you?" Gabriel asked in a conversational tone, still at a distance that only her vampire hearing allowed her to hear. She smiled coyly but said nothing as he and Eileen reached the bench where she sat.

"Well, at least you didn't make us wait like last time." The jest was showing in his iridescent, silver eyes, which had just a hint of blue around the edges.

"Impatience constant in the mind brings unhappiness to the soul," she rebutted, looking up at him.

"You remember you live in twenty-first century America now, right?" Gabriel teased as she stood.

Gabriel was tall, strong and protective. Jules felt that his name fit him well, the angles of his face were near perfection and his blond hair reminded her of a halo. However, in actuality, it was his personality that reminded her of an angel. Gabriel had a passion for people. He was a teacher, a protector, a guide. His greatest joy was teaching new generations. Jules had found him after the Battle of Brier Creek. A new vampire fresh off the battlefield, unsure how to be what he was.

Jules had tried to teach him but, in the end, it had been he who had reminded her that human life was sacred.

For Jules, the temptation to kill was too great. So, together, they invented other ways to get the blood they needed: Red Cross, campus blood drives, even raiding the blood bank at a hospital when necessary.

Eileen, Gabriel's wife of near forty years, was as free-spirited as they come. Her black hair hung long, past her waist, and complimented her bronzed skin, native to this land. The silver of age had not overtaken the original black color of her human eyes yet. She was still an infant vampire.

It was always a risk, taking such a young vampire into the heart of human habitation. Eileen didn't possess the control that Jules and Gabriel had worked many years to attain. Regardless, Eileen had begged to accompany them to the Promenade tonight. Apparently, she saw an art show opening advertised that had sparked her interest.

Jules let down her hood as the three deadliest predators in Maine walked down a busy street to enter the small gallery a few shops away.

As they walked, Jules felt Gabriel's hand grasp her shoulder. Her head shot up. There was *one...two...three...* Jules counted six in the pack that was congregating outside Seaside Soda Shop.

They hollered and howled as they were joined by yet another. This one was bigger than most of the others and he had an Alpha's commanding presence.

"Werewolves," Gabriel hissed.

Jules placed a comforting hand on his arm. "Just keep going," she said quietly. "They've never attacked us before. This town is big enough for both species."

"But Jules," Gabriel protested as he placed himself between Eileen and the wolves. Eileen's hand went reflexively up to brush one of the long scars on her face.

Jules knew the unspoken treaty of the supernatural beings in Aboit had never set well with her coven. Past events had left them uneasy around members of this other supernatural species.

"I said, ignore them," Jules whispered and made to move on down the wide sidewalk. But just as she started to turn away, she froze. She had caught sight of one of the wolves. He was stunning, tall, and lean. He had tan skin, dark hair, brilliant green eyes, and features reminiscent of someone Jules had known long ago. His eyes locked with her own. She could not turn away.

"Jules?" Eileen's concerned voice seemed distant.

She heard Gabriel hiss again. This time it was directed at the pack, and yet, she still couldn't tear her gaze from the mesmerizing werewolf's.

The Alpha charged at them and Gabriel met the challenge. The two crashed into one another with supernatural force. But the scuffle knocked into Jules, pulling her focus away from *him*. As she assessed the situation, she noted that the other wolves had yet to join the fray. Jules knew she had to intervene before this situation escalated. Just then, the Alpha threw a full-fisted punch at Gabriel, who avoided it by sidestepping ever so slightly. Jules took advantage of the moment and

leaped directly between the two fighting men. She stood, arms outstretched to her sides. This move had the desired effect, the Alpha froze, mid-stride. Jules turned her full attention on Gabriel for just a second. “Back down,” Jules commanded with a hiss.

“Jules, move...” Gabriel said.

She silenced him with a glare. “I know what I’m doing.”

Gabriel conceded and moved back a few paces to stand in front of Eileen. Jules turned to confront the Alpha.

“Vampire scum,” the Alpha said, apparently having gotten over his shock that such a small woman would intervene.

Jules scowled. She couldn’t believe he was stupid enough to say that out loud. By now, the incident had drawn quite a crowd of spectators.

“Move, or you’ll be the one to die,” the Alpha spat, but this time it was only loud enough for Jules to hear.

Jules ignored the threat, but said, “you are the Alpha, yes? According to the rules of proper engagement, you must deal with me now.”

“You lead this coven?” the Alpha asked.

“I do,” Jules stated evenly, stepping into a stance that exuded the position and power of her years. Out of the corner of her eye, Jules saw that the other pack members had begun to encourage the crowd to disperse. She breathed a sigh of relief. At least she wouldn’t have to deal with being exposed to the local humans on top of this inconvenient confrontation.

"You?" the Alpha mocked. "A girl...what about that male of yours?" He gestured toward Gabriel.

"I may look young, but I wouldn't underestimate me if I were you."

"You're a child," he said, growling at her a bit as he said it.

"For an immortal being you seem to be unaware of how immortality works." Jules heard two of the pack member's chuckle. The Alpha's face grew redder.

So, lightening the mood to defuse the situation would not work. Jules changed her approach. "My coven should never have engaged you. And for that, I offer my apologies." This approach, however, did have the desired effect.

"Your apologies mean nothing to me," the Alpha spat. But his expression had turned smug, rather than murderous.

"I am sure this can be solved diplomatically," Jules said. "If my apologies are not sufficient, what do you suggest, Alpha?"

The Alpha seemed to be considering this question. After a few moments, he said, "this town is under my jurisdiction. You and your coven are no longer welcome here. You will leave tonight."

Jules sighed. This is not what she had intended. "We have coexisted peacefully in this town for years. Surely we can come to some other arrangement," she said as politely as she could manage.

"You will leave tonight," he repeated forcefully.

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