

# Blood Stone

by Melenka

A story of magic, longing, and a cruel curse.

## Juliana

Chapter 1 of 1

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Chimes tinkled as the door opened and was closed again. The soft shush of ballet slippers moved closer. The jeweler allowed himself a small smile but did not look up.

"Mr. Ormand?"

He set down his tools and rose. "You must be Juliana."

"You expected me?" She sighed, the way only teenagers could. "Grandma." Again, spoken with the weight of derision reserved for youth toward their elders.

He did not correct her assumption. "How may I help you?"

"I need to have a jewel set. Grandma insists it be done by tomorrow. I told her I can wait for my birthday present."

"Ah, a gift. May I see the stone?"

As she placed it in his hand, the weight of familiarity settled over him. Dark red with a hint of brown, the cut hadn't been replicated in over a hundred years. *Longer*. He didn't dwell on that.

"How would you like it mounted?" He smiled at Juliana. She looked nothing like her mother, nor her grandmother in her youth. *She's the fourth*. He wondered if he would remain steady enough to be the first in his line to see a fifth.

"Grandma says it has to be something I'll wear all the time, so a bracelet is out. It's too big for a stud, and besides, there isn't another one." Juliana looked up. "Unless you could cut it in two? That would be cool."

He suppressed a shudder. "No, I don't believe I would be able to do that." *No one could*.

"Then I guess it's a ring or a necklace."

"That has been tradition for..." He stopped himself. "...jewels of this nature."

She shrugged. "What do you suggest?"

He licked his lips. None of the others had asked. "Are you a Christian?"

"I was baptized, but I don't go to church. I'd feel weird wearing a cross, if that's what you're getting at."

"So you don't have faith?" He knew he should not push, knew that he needed to.

She blushed. "Well... I do, but grandma doesn't know about it."

"And your mother?"

"My mom doesn't know anything about me!" She took a shaky breath. "She left when I was small."

"I did not mean to upset you." He would have to tread carefully. "You said you have faith. Let's work with that."

Her jaw set as she looked up at him. "I'm Wiccan, okay? I doubt you know what that is."

"I am well-versed in the symbols of most faiths. I suspect your grandmother would dislike a pentacle. Perhaps something less obvious." He sketched a flowing knot, three swirls moving out from the center.

"It's a triskele." Her fingers traced the lines of their own accord.

"I could make it fancier."

"No! This is perfect." She looked up at him. "Do you work in silver?"

"This stone should be set in gold." He noted her frown and continued quickly. "White gold would work just as well as yellow. Silver would corrode the gem." He prayed she believed the lie. He'd told so few in his life. Surely, he could be forgiven for one that served the greater good.

She placed the stone in the center of the drawing. "Yes. That's what I want."

"It will be done by your birthday."

"You don't have to rush."

"When inspired, I will work through the night to see the result."

"I'll stop by tomorrow night, then."

"If I know you'll come straightaway, it will be ready when you get out of school."

She smiled. "You're the best, Mr. Ormand! Grandma was right to send me to you."

*She had no choice.*

Juliana was out the door before he could respond aloud. He slipped the stone into its velvet pouch and returned to his workbench. The chimes rang again. He looked up to see if she'd forgotten something or changed her mind.

It was not Juliana.

He turned the page over and tucked the jewel into a box, pocketing the key. A small creature jumped onto the counter and glared at him. In all his years, he had yet to discover what sort of animal it was. His gaze moved past the creature, knowing what he would see. The young man by the door remained unchanged by time.

"Hiding the stone, Francois?" Rich laughter brought images of lush woods with pools of sparkling water. "I am hardly going to take it from you." The boy tilted his head and smiled. "Though if I'd a mind to, you couldn't stop me."

"You cannot touch it."

"Oh, I **could** touch it. I simply won't."

"And her?"

"Well, that all depends on whether or not she keeps her jewelry on like a good girl, doesn't it?"

"Leave them be," Francois pleaded. "It's long done."

"It is not yet done," the young man said softly. "Had I a choice, it would have ended with Irina, as you well know. This is her doing, not mine."

"She's a century dead."

"More." The word struck like iron.

"Why take out your hatred on her descendants?"

The young man ran elegant fingers through dark auburn curls. A red jewel sparkled in his lone ring. "I do not hate them. I have befriended and protected each one. Loved them unconditionally. And I will go on loving them until one decides to love me back. That is my curse, laid by the first woman I loved, who could not find it in herself to return my affection yet refused to let me go. In all these years, you are the only one to have asked." He turned away. "Juliana is made in Irina's image."

The creature jumped onto the young man's shoulder. He scooped it up and dropped it in his pocket. It gave an irritated squeak.

The young man turned to regard the jeweler. "If you think me evil, make the necklace so beautiful she can't bear to take it off. I will feel my heart break again, unable to reach her, and when her daughter comes of age, it will begin anew." He moved toward the door. "Teach your successor well, Francois. Love should not come because of defective work."

The chimes played discord as the young man closed the door behind him.