

[PDF] Sacrifice (The Legacy Trilogy)

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Books Details:

Title: Sacrifice (The Legacy Trilogy)

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Released: 2012-10-23

Language:

Pages: 448

ISBN: 0373210442

ISBN13: 978-0373210442

ASIN: 0373210442



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Description:

About the Author Cayla Kluver was born on October 2, 1992, in Wisconsin. She has cats, dogs and horses, and watches more crime shows than is probably healthy. Her office is filled with twinkly lights, candles, and fun colors. She loves Robert Louis Stevenson and the Beatles. Legacy is her first novel. Visit Cayla at www.caylakluver.com, friend her on Facebook and follow her on Twitter @CaylaKL.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. I inhaled deeply, held my breath, then released it in a *whoosh*, repeating the process thrice over to quell my anxiety, with a predictable lack of success. Looking to the door at my left, which led into the corridor, I imagined my guests entering and realized for the thousandth time the danger, stupidity and yet necessity of what I was doing. I was creating an explosive situation and, like lightning striking dry grass, I didn't know if I would get sparks or a wildfire.

"The time?" I asked, throat dry.

"They aren't late, if that's what you mean."

London was leaning against the wall behind me, having been reassigned as my personal bodyguard, a duty he took most seriously. Although I had been named Grand Provost of the Hytanican Province by the High Priestess, London did not trust that the Cokyrians would respect that decision, and felt I was in greater need of protection than ever before.

After much thought, I'd chosen what had been the King's Drawing Room for this meeting, believing it to be the most neutral ground. Memories and pain lurked in almost every corner of the Palace of Hytanica—which had been redubbed the Bastion by the Cokyrians—but this room was nondescript and held no particular significance, unlike the Hall of Kings, where the thrones of our royalty had been removed along with the portraits of rulers past; unlike the strategy room where we had planned our last defenses; unlike the offices that had formerly been Steldor's as King, Cannan's as the Captain of the Guard and Galen's as Sergeant at Arms.

This would be the first time since the occupation that the most influential men of my kingdom would come face-to-face with Narian, the Commander of the Cokyrian Forces. These were the men who had delivered me to safety during the attack and who had proved their valor again and again while we'd grappled for leverage from our hiding place in the caves of the Nineyre Mountains. And Narian was the man I loved, who had operated under duress, for the Overlord had held my sister's life in his hands; he had bargained with the warlord, done all he could to save our troops and our people, but still wounds were raw among my fellows. Cannan's beloved brother Baelic had been tortured to death by the Overlord merely for his relation to the captain. London and Halias, deputy captains in the Elite Guard and bodyguards to my sister and me, had suffered "more than they would ever say," by the warlord's own claim; and Destari, another faithful deputy captain, had been slain before London's eyes. I could not blame my friends for their bitterness, nor deny my own, though mine was not directed at Narian.

At long last, the door I had been watching opened and the Hytanican men entered: Cannan and Steldor, so alike with their formidable builds, dark eyes and nearly black hair, although Steldor's features were otherwise those of his beautiful mother; Galen, slightly lighter in coloring than his best friend, his generally more forgiving nature eradicated by the war; and Halias, whose twinkling blue eyes seemed harder and whose sandy hair was cut short, physical signs of the loss of his easygoing manner.

All bowed before me, to my chagrin referring to me as Queen Alera, before sharing nods with London that bespoke of the respect the men held for each other.

"You should not call me Queen," I reminded them, keeping my volume low, always conscious these days that someone might overhear. "I am Grand Provost now. I don't think we should flout the High Priestess on such a minor matter as titles."

"It is not a minor matter," Cannan briskly contradicted me. "You are a member of the royal family with a right to the throne—our Queen. The High Priestess will have no choice but to tolerate our insolence, for we will address you in no other way."

I bit my lip, exasperated but not knowing how to articulate it in light of their loyalty.

"Won't you sit, then?" I managed to say, gesturing toward several armchairs.

"No. We wouldn't want to offend our *delegate*"

It was Steldor who had spoken, his infamous temper sizzling as he referenced Narian, though it was not the same anger that I had come to know during our tumultuous marriage, which had ended when he'd sought an annulment from the church out of respect for my wishes. No, this anger was deeply rooted, born out of pain, oppression and the knowledge that the man he held at least partly responsible for Hytanica's destruction would join us at any moment.

Cannan glanced at his son, sympathy and an admonition in his gaze, then more civilly expressed the sentiment.

"We'll stand, at least until Narian arrives."

With no choice but to accept this decision, I continued to wait with them in awkward silence, my nervousness growing with each passing second, for I knew what Narian would say. I had called this meeting at his behest, both of us having recognized that the request needed to come from me if there were to be any chance of getting provincial rule off to a decent start.

It was not a sound but the stiffening of backs that told me Narian had arrived. I turned to face the door opposite the one the Hytanican men had used, the one that led into the Throne Room—or what had been the Throne Room—and saw him standing there. Like the others, he was several inches taller than me and well-muscled, though we all knew his power ranged beyond the physical. His deep blue eyes went briefly to me, then he appraised the former military men who, despite their stoicism, could not conceal their enmity, and quietly closed the door.

"Gentlemen," Narian said, the word a touch too well pronounced. "Grand Provost Alera."

The formality Narian maintained toward me in official capacities was essential. We had repaired our relationship, but the province was not ready to learn of it. And though the present company was knowledgeable of the affection between us, they were far from ready to accept it.

I nodded, although no one else issued a welcome. Narian, who was cool and controlled almost to a fault and had long ago given up hope of befriending these men, ignored their disrespect.

"I bring word from the High Priestess," he informed them in his subtle accent, stepping farther into the room, London also joining the group. "I suggest you seat yourselves. She has much to say."

When none of the men stirred, I moved to occupy an armchair, thinking they would follow my lead. They did not, and I wondered if they would have seated themselves if the suggestion had not come from Narian.

Ignoring their effrontery once more, Narian proceeded to untie a leather cylinder from his belt, removing a scroll from within it. My heart pounded as though it alone were driving blood through everyone's veins. He unrolled the document and began to read.

"Upon this Twenty-second Day of May in the First Year of Cokyrian dominance over the Province of Hytanica, the following regulations are put into place, to be conveyed directly to Hytanica's upper tier—" Narian nodded to the men assembled, whom the proclamation indicated "—and posted throughout the city and countryside so that no citizen may avoid accountability by a plea of ignorance. The violation of any rule herein established will be punished severely, with bodily harm, imprisonment or execution.

"Regulation One. The possession of weapons of war by any Hytanican man, woman or child, other than the Grand Provost's bodyguard, is strictly prohibited. All such weapons must be surrendered immediately to Cokyrian forces. Permitted are farm implements, one ax per household for the chopping of wood, cutlery, tools for construction and daggers under six inches long by the blade."

Cannan motioned to Steldor and Galen, both of whom met his gaze in a silent challenge before simultaneously reaching into their right boot shafts and withdrawing daggers that contravened this law. Each flipped his knife around to catch the blade before extending it to Narian, who confiscated the weapons with a cold stare they gladly returned. After laying the daggers on the table beside the chair in which I sat, Narian again unfurled the parchment.

"Regulation Two. Cokyri will maintain complete control over access in and out of the city. Cokyrian soldiers will man the gate and may subject any passers to search and seizure with or without cause.

"Three. The borders of the Hytanican Province will be guarded by Cokyrian soldiers during and after the construction of the Province Wall. No citizen may cross the border without explicit permission from the Commander of the Cokyrian Forces within the province, such permission to be evidenced by the seal of the High Priestess."

I looked at the ring on Narian's right hand, knowing that London would also recognize it as the Overlord's, for he had stolen it while a prisoner and had worn it for seventeen years. The twin to the ring resided on the hand of the High Priestess; thus Narian had the ability to provide her seal.

"Four. The Hytanican Province will maintain no military force of its own. The former military base will belong exclusively to Cokyrian soldiers, who alone will be the peacekeeping force within the city and throughout the countryside. The military school will continue in a strictly academic capacity, for the intellectual betterment of the province's youth, both male and female.

"Five. Foreign trade will recommence following the completion of the Province Wall in order to accelerate the recovery of the province's economy. However, all tradesmen will be searched and those carrying impermissible items will be turned away.

"Six. Hunting parties will register with the Cokyrian Weaponry Officer in order to receive permission and appropriate arms. At the conclusion of the hunt, all weapons sha...

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