



JESIKAH SUNDIN

LEGACY

BOOK ONE IN "THE BIODOME CHRONICLES"

"IN ORDER TO LIVE, SOMETHING MUST DIE"

LEGACY

BOOK ONE

IN "THE BIODOME CHRONICLES"

by

JESIKAH SUNDIN

Just Imagine...

Developmental Editing & Publishing



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LEGACY

*Love is
The funeral pyre
Where I have laid my living body.*

*All the false notions of myself
That once caused fear, pain,*

*Have turned to ash
As I neared God.*

*What has risen
From the tangled web of thought and sinew
Now shines with jubilation
Through the eyes of angels
And screams from the guts of Infinite existence
Itself.*

*Love is the funeral pyre
Where the heart must lay
Its body.*

—Hafiz, *The Gift*, 14th Century *

CHAPTER ONE



New Eden Township, Salton Sea, California

Monday, September 28, 2054

Year 19 of Project Phase One

A knock quietly sounded, and Leaf lifted his head out of his hands and toward the hewn wooden door. He shifted uncomfortably in a chair as he cast a weary glance at his father's corpse, positioned on a litter stretched across a narrow table.

With a heavy sigh, Leaf rose from the high-back chair. He trudged across the planked floor but did not recall a single step, startling when his eyes naturally squinted against the bright morning sun. When did he open the door? His eyes burned as he strained to focus on a young woman from the village who held a ceramic pitcher and a wooden bowl filled with hemp rags.

"For you, My Lord." She offered the contents of her hands with a curtsy, rising when Leaf carefully received each object.

"Thank you," he mumbled, his dry and gritty throat aching with each word. The tangy smell of vinegar irritated his nose, but

he maintained a composed expression.

“May I be of further service, My Lord?”

Leaf whispered, “No, but you are most kind for asking.”

“Your father was a good man and shall be sorely missed.”

She bobbed her head with a sad smile.

Leaf remained passive as his attentions slipped to another place. Chimerical thoughts fed his dreamlike state, and his body hurt with the heartache of remaining fastened to reality. He glanced up to repay the honor of her words, but she had vanished. Leaf blinked his eyes and frantically looked around the second-story deck and out into the forest, unsure of how long he stood in the doorway. He had seen the candlemaker’s daughter, and yet looked past where she stood as if she was immaterial. The vinegar sloshed with his movements, and he peered absently at the objects in his hands.

The pitcher and bowl clanged as he placed them on a small cupboard, the sound loud to the unnatural silence of his family home, and he flinched. He shut the door and held the iron ring, carefully resting the knob flush against the wood to prevent any further noise, as if it would disrupt his father’s rest. The air in Leaf’s chest stilled as he studied the serene expression on his father’s face—eyes closed, and lips positioned into a small smile of eternal acceptance. Heartbeats echoed audibly in Leaf’s ears as he waited for his father to awake from the slumbers of this nightmare.

The delusions parted, and Leaf shook his head of such thoughts. This was not rest. His father would never awake. The deep and gentle rumble of his voice would no longer fill their home with his laughter, words of guidance, or his kind encouragements. This was real.

Leaf’s shoulders began to shake as the flux of foreign and painful emotions surfaced. He had not shed a single tear since his father’s last breath the prior afternoon, too shocked by the grief and by the invisible crown that had been placed upon his head. And although his body convulsed with sorrow now, the tears did not come. A grief-stricken sigh escaped as a shudder, and he rubbed at the latent tears in his eyes with the palms of his hands, determined to keep his faculties intact.

His sisters needed him, as did the community, both terrifying thoughts as a yoke of responsibility fell upon him, the

load increasing as the day progressed, and it was only morning. Would he be able to stand come evening meal? He took a deep breath and lowered his head into his hands. Thinking must remain sharp, a difficult task at present, but he needed to channel his emotional energy to remain strong, despite his beliefs that he was not equipped for such a future.

Vinegar faintly replaced the stench of death as he poured the honey-colored liquid into the wooden bowl. He reached in and grabbed a rag, lightly wringing out excess vinegar, and then turned toward his father. Leaf did not wish for assistance. He shooed even his sisters from the home to the care of others in the community. This was his duty, and he wished for solitude as he prepared his father's body for cremation. The rag gently washed over the lifeless skin of his father's arm. With tentative touches Leaf lowered the sheet and washed his father's chest. He paused to see if he could feel the warm rhythm of a beating heart and swallowed against the cold silence.

Small groans escaped through clenched teeth as Leaf strained to roll his father onto his side in order to wash his back. A linden tree tattoo stretched between his father's shoulder blades in black dye, and Leaf traced the branches, trunks and roots as he thought of the medieval symbol of love and marriage. His father now joined his mother in Heaven, death no longer parting the union they once shared. The rag dripped with vinegar, and Leaf squeezed at the moisture with detached movements as he processed and absorbed all the events that led to this moment.

Lightly he brushed the rag along the neck and shoulders, lowering his father onto his back once more. Leaf's fingertips lifted the sheet back up to his father's chest and then exposed his father's legs. Blood pooled beneath the skin near his father's feet. Leaf gently moved the rag down the length of both legs as he thought of how his father would no longer walk upon the Earth. The moisture sheened on the pale and bluish skin, and Leaf watched as vinegar tears dribbled onto the litter.

He whispered, "I am so afraid. How am I to fare without you father?" Leaf's gaze slowly wandered to his father's face, and he studied each beloved and familiar feature. "How shall I care for my sisters when the community disbands? How shall I ever be worthy of such honor given in The Legacy when I have never seen

the Outside world? You asked so much of me in just two breaths, and I fear I shall disappoint you.”

Leaf paused and took in a deep breath, feeling his heart brim with an overwhelming desire to purge all the regret and anxiety. He leaned onto the table and continued whispering all the things he wished he would have told his father, all the questions he was previously too afraid to ask, desperate for the pain to ease in his chest. But it would not lessen.

He turned around to gather his thoughts and returned the rag to the bowl, studying the garments his sister Willow had prepared and left upon the cupboard early this morning. She had stayed up late into the night embroidering an oak tree on the chest of the tunic, their family symbol signifying nobility belonging to the Earth Element House. The tunic would need modification to dress his father’s stiff body.

In the corner of the main room lay Willow’s spinning wheel and sewing basket. The soft thud of his footsteps interrupted the silence, and he paused before the basket, grabbing the shears, and then shuffled back to the cupboard. He lifted the linen tunic and cut a straight line down the back, a light metallic noise punching through the apartment with each snip.

The tunic fluttered in the air with a snap of his wrist and then lightly draped over his father’s chest. Leaf gingerly maneuvered each arm into place, tucking the back beneath the body.

The linen breeches slipped on easily and Leaf tugged on them until they reached his father’s waist, tying the laces with shaky fingers. His father’s favorite leather belt was tucked beside where the garments lain originally, and Leaf held up the mildly studded leather stamped in a leaf design. With sluggish movements he removed his own belt and tied it around his father’s waist in a Celtic knot, carefully laying the remnant down the center to his mid-thigh.

The aged leather of his father’s belt felt soft as it slipped through Leaf’s hands while wrapping it around his own waist, and he reverently brushed his fingers along the stamped design. “You are needed. Do not ever feel unworthy or insignificant,” his father’s deep voice soothed from his memories. “A leaf’s sole purpose is to nourish the tree, from the newly budding green on each branch to

the decaying yellow that litters the roots. The tree is a community, an ecosystem, and you are a necessary and noble ingredient to sustain its very existence.”

The voice faded and Leaf tentatively took his father’s hand in his, gently squeezing the fingers, stiffened and unyielding from the rigor mortis. He had prepared his father’s body for cremation but did not wish to inform Connor, the Fire Element, or the undertaker quite yet. Instead, he pulled up a high-back wooden chair and held his father’s hand, too afraid to let go. Time passed in a blur and his eyes grew heavy. Leaf slumped forward and placed his forehead upon his father’s hand in honor, closing his eyes and gripping the fingers in search of comfort and direction.

He woke with a start, flinging his body back against the chair when he felt a warm hand touch his shoulder. Connor crouched next to him with eyebrows drawn together, his large frame blocking the light from the latticed window.

“You have done well, son. Go outside and freshen your mind while my family pays their respects. I shall care for the remaining details for your home.” The last words ended in a choked whisper and Connor tensed his face to remain in control. The Fire Element’s eyes rested on the belt tied to Leaf’s waist, eliciting a sad smile of approval. “Willow and Laurel shall return shortly. Cook wished to know what to prepare for evening meal in your family’s honor this eve.”

Leaf cleared his throat to respond, but the muscles were too tight, so he nodded instead. He slowly rose from the chair and lowered his head, staggering through the opened door and past Connor’s wife, Brianna, who stood nearby with red-rimmed eyes and a paled complexion. Coal, their eldest son, placed his hand upon Leaf’s shoulder and bowed in respect. Unable to speak and not wishing to move any more than he needed to, Leaf paused to acknowledge the gesture and then continued toward the railing of the large deck.

The trees stood still, nary a leaf moving from the lack of bio-wind, and he breathed in the fresh air, clearing his nose of death and vinegar. His forearms rested against the railing as he stooped forward and hung his head. He sought to divert his mind by studying the patterns in the wood grain. Detachment dangerously encroached, drawing nearer with whispered promises

of no pain. He wanted to succumb to the false relief but resisted.

Soft footsteps sounded from his right and he faintly turned his head and watched as Ember, the Daughter of Fire, Connor's eldest, approached from the stairwell. She remained outside upon the deck and stared into the forest at a respectable distance from him without offering condolences or peering his direction. Leaf greedily absorbed the comfort her presence brought him, casting furtive glances her way as his thoughts spun round in a vortex of anxiety.

More footsteps sounded from the stairwell as the Wind Element House and Water Element House arrived. Leaf glanced over his shoulder and timidly met the eyes of Skylar, Son of Wind. His friend appeared on the verge of tears as he bowed deeply, turning quickly on his heel as he followed his father into the apartment. Ember remained along the railing and maintained an even gaze into the woods which forested nearly half of the main biodome and was situated just a stone's throw from the apartments.

Somehow she understood his desire to not feel alone while simultaneously wishing to be left alone, a perfect balance of support he did not know he craved until this moment. The emotions of others and their desire to express their sympathy and care for his family drained his reserves. There was no fault with the community, their love and support was overwhelming, but he was a private individual and found strength in quiet solitude.

Voices and footsteps mingled behind him while he kept his eyes fixed on the evergreens and deciduous trees beneath the geodesic sky. Occasionally he glanced toward the clearing and grassy path along the apartments in search of Willow and Laurel. Shadows shifted as the sun moved, and he studied the angles to discern the time when he no longer sensed activity or motion in his home. He glanced to his side and felt an immediate pang of loneliness. And guilt that he had failed to notice Ember's departure.

Squaring his shoulders, he stood tall and walked with determined steps back to his home before the ceremony bearers began the procession. His sisters would arrive any moment, and he needed to be strong and maintain a rooted sense of reality.

In the doorstep, he studied his father's body and then

slowly walked into the apartment. Leaf rested his hand upon his father's chest and leaned down, kissing him on the cheek. In a whisper, Leaf said, "I love you," letting out a heavy sigh as sorrow twisted his stomach into painful spasms of anxiety. To release the tension he smoothed out ripples in the tunic his sister had sewn, picking and pulling at various folds rumbled by those who touched his father one last time. Leaf wanted to ensure the presentation was the very best for his sisters.

As his hand brushed over the linen fabric his mind wandered to the various traditions of the Cremation Ceremony. The elder women of the community would shroud his father's body but not until Leaf checked his father's garments for any personal items in view of the community. Leaf never quite understood this tradition as all bodies were prepared with clean clothing. Nevertheless, the head male of the home would pull out an item of sentimental value from a pocket. Traditions rarely included logic, he thought, and their origins were sometimes as muddled as the ritual.

Where did the sentimental item come from? Did he place it inside his father's pocket, or did another leave an object for Leaf to discover? If he recalled correctly, most in his role seemed surprised and touched by what they found. His father appeared astonished and then overcome when he had pulled out mother's carved-dragon hair comb while performing this custom during her Cremation Ceremony eight years ago. Willow cherished the keepsake, a gift given to her from father shortly after the Second Ceremony for mother's ashes.

Should he search the pockets and pretend ignorance before the gathering, or honor the tradition and remain genuinely surprised? Leaf creased his brows and narrowed his eyes in concentration, frustrated with the moral dilemma. He lowered his head into his hands and shuffled his feet, considering each argument. Would he scandalize his home if he failed to pull an object from his father's pocket? How weighted was this tradition? Until today, he had never been personally involved in funeral arrangements and did not possess much of a foundation to form logical conclusions on such matters.

In the end, he decided that traditions mattered to the community, even though he could not comprehend the importance

of this particular one. He would check his father's pockets. If there was no object to be found, then he needed to search for one to place, and hopefully before his sisters returned home.

His hand, trembling from fatigue, reached into a pocket, and his fingers scooped inside and touched only the soft linen. He blinked his eyes and forced breath into his body. Why did he feel so nervous? It was an irrational reaction that added to the frustration of trying to maintain control and a sense order. Walking to the other side of the litter, he repeated the same process and stilled when his fingers touched what felt like stiff paper, and he creased his eyebrows once more. What could possibly be in his father's pocket with this texture? His father did not possess playing cards nor partook in such games. Gently Leaf pulled the object out, examining the small, repeating geometric pattern. Perplexed by such a find he carefully turned it over to examine the other side and felt the air rush from his body as he stared at the image of a snuffed out candle.

He gripped the card as a burst of anger surged through his limbs, competing against the spooked sensations unsettling his nerves. His eyes darted around the apartment as he attempted to accept the implication, his father's final instruction echoing in his mind with new understanding.

Yesterday afternoon returned in an overwhelming rush, and Leaf felt his father's weight in his arms all over again. The Rows—the main agricultural garden—was empty due to the afternoon rest prior to evening meal, providing a moment of privacy. His father had gasped for air and clutched his left arm with large, labor-worn hands as his face contorted in pain. Last words for Leaf to gather his sisters and leave New Eden were spoken between wheezes and through clenched teeth. The revelation, instructions and pleas haunted Leaf; and he felt confused as to what he should do.

A shadow shifted by the latticed window, gaining Leaf's preoccupied attention, and he gripped the card as his hand shook from the tightened muscles.

"Is all well?"

He startled, sucking in a quick breath, and then stared wide-eyed at his sister Willow, who stood in the doorway while averting her eyes toward the window. He said in a low raspy voice, "Yes, all is in order. Father is clothed, you may look." Although

Leaf's hand shook, he slipped the card into his pocket with subtle movements and then cleared his throat. "Shall I leave, providing you a private moment?"

Willow blanched as she glanced at their father with a drawn and melancholy expression, her breath hitching loudly as she shuddered against the forming tears. His sister's eyes were puffy and bruised from weeping and lack of sleep, her cries through the night and morning adding to the heaviness in his heart. She shook her head with detached movements while studying the shell of their father and said, "I do not wish to be alone. Please remain in the room."

"Of course." Leaf looked behind him to sit, noting a high-back chair, and then paused. "Where is Laurel?"

His sister's eyes rounded and she placed fingers over her mouth. "I am not sure," she said in a sudden panic. "She remained outside as I went into the Great Hall to meet with Cook, and then I left and walked the forest, my mind drawn to other attentions."

"Willow," he sighed in exasperation as he rubbed his temples. "This is our last opportunity alone with father before the procession. Shall I fetch her or will you?"

Both glanced at the body stretched between them and then met each other's eyes, and Leaf's shoulders fell when Willow's expression hardened.

"How could you be so unfeeling?" She crossed her arms as angry tears trailed down her face.

Leaf closed his eyes for a couple of heartbeats. His sister could be so infuriating at times. "What would you have me do? Laurel was in your charge. Our sister deserves final farewells, same as you."

"I did not set out to ruin such plans." She looked at father's belt around Leaf's waist and then turned her head toward the wall. "You are not the only one affected by father's death, Leaf Watson!"

"Laurel is eight years old and you are nearly sixteen, a grown woman. I am not suggesting that you ruined such plans. I am reminding you that she needs our protection. We are her parents now."

"Protection from what exactly? That is a most peculiar statement."

His fingers touched the card in his pocket as angry thoughts continued to demand his notice. "Protection against the fear of losing a parent and feeling unsafe. We need to consider her feelings and needs above our own at present and, therefore, we should ensure she does not feel alone as well."

"Please do not patronize me. I am not a selfish person despite your claims of unladylike deportment."

Leaf groaned in frustration. "Stop twisting my words, Willow. I have said no such thing and would appreciate a modicum of respect."

"Yes, *My Lord*." She dipped into a curtsy and then covered her face with her hands as she began to gently sob once more while peeking through her fingers at their father's body.

He lowered his gaze to the floor unable to watch his sister struggle, feeling guilt for his words spoken in irritation. She had stayed up late to embroider the oak tree on father's tunic, crying most of the morning, especially when the undertaker brought father back home. At present Leaf did not possess the fortitude to endure any conflicts or strong emotions. He could barely meet his own needs let alone his sister's, whose penchant for melodrama tested his patience even when he was of a whole and sound mind. But he needed to. It was now his responsibility to care for her needs, regardless of how he felt, and he would endeavor to treat her with the love father gave.

He softened his face and said in a quiet voice, "I have felt my mind slipping away today as well." Leaf offered a kind smile, and then opened his mouth to say more when a light knock sounded on the open door. Ember stood in the doorway beside Laurel with a solemn downcast gaze, allowing Leaf to regard her profile unnoticed.

Willow turned toward the door and a smile formed through the tears. She knelt on the floor and then opened her arms. "Oh darling, I am so sorry." Laurel walked into her embrace and began to quietly cry, peering over Willow's shoulder toward their father.

Leaf whispered, "Thank you, My Lady," turning away as his face warmed. Did Ember hear his confession? Or his argument with Willow?

"My father wishes to inform you that he shall arrive soon. The funeral pyre is prepared," Ember said and briefly met his eyes

with a crestfallen smile. He offered a quick nod of acknowledgement. "Laurel was happily playing with Corona, but I knew you would wish for her to be present when the ceremony bearers arrived."

"Yes, thank you." He bowed, humbly paying respect for her considerations.

She softly spoke, "I shall take my leave," while quietly shutting their entry door.

"Ember, wait," he spoke urgently and then stopped. She tarried and studied his face as he hesitated to speak further. He blinked his eyes with shyness and then looked away. "I appreciate your care of my sister." Ember dipped her head and then shut the door.

Leaf stared at the dark wood and wrought iron braces, the handle rhythmically knocking against the door. The house dimmed, casting gray tones over his father's skin. The sudden darkness quieted Willow and Laurel, who stared at the body with occasional hiccups and blotchy faces. Laurel nervously bit on her tiny fingernails as Willow rested her hand upon their sister's small shoulder. Somber steps carried him to another cupboard, and he pulled out a ceramic bowl, fire nest material, and striking rocks. Within minutes he lit the main candles of their home with a lighting stick, positioning tallow tapers near the body, warming and softening his father's features.

"Come say your farewells," Leaf encouraged softly, taking their father's hand. "He shall soon be carried away to become one with the elements."

In a whisper, Laurel asked, "Will we bother him?"

"No, ma chère," Leaf said. He walked over and knelt before her. "Father is in Heaven. Although his spirit no longer resides in his body, he hears our words as we speak to him. I am quite certain of it."

His littlest sister bit her lower lip and then hesitantly walked to the litter. She reached out a hand and gently laid it upon their father's, closing her eyes as tears squeezed through and ran down her cheeks. Willow walked up behind their sister, placed a hand on her shoulder, and then leaned down and kissed their father upon the cheek as Leaf had done earlier.

"I love you father," Willow spoke with a cracked voice.

“Please give mother our love.”

“Lift me up?” Laurel asked, glancing at Leaf over her shoulder. “I wish to kiss father as well.” Leaf lifted his sister and she delicately kissed their father’s cheek, pulling back quickly. “He is so cold. We should cover him with a blanket.”

Leaf placed his sister back onto the ground as he exchanged a worried look with Willow.

Laurel disappeared into their parent’s room, emerging with a woolen lap blanket, draping it across their father with loving ministrations. “There, now he shall be warm.”

“Yes, indeed,” Leaf said with a smile. “I am sure he appreciates your kindness.” Laurel looked up at him with a happy smile and his heart constricted.

A quiet knock rung through the silence and the flames bent and knelt before their father when the door opened. Connor stood in the doorway, stepping aside as Brother Markus entered their apartment carrying the Holy Scriptures in his hand.

“The ceremony bearers are ready,” Connor said.

Leaf nodded his head as he and his sisters lifted the hoods on their cloaks of mourning and stepped out of the way. Connor approached the litter and blew out the candles surrounding his father’s body, and then waved for the bearers to enter.

The ceremony bearers represented the three remaining Noble houses of the community—Connor, the Fire Element; Timothy, the Wind Element; and Alex, the Water Element’s husband—along with Jeff, the town barrister. The men lifted the bamboo poles and placed them upon their shoulders as they slowly marched from the apartment with Brother Markus at the lead.

Leaf regarded each man warily, searching their faces for any sign that they had placed the mysterious card in his father’s pocket. He did not find a replacement item and no longer cared for such a tradition. The community may be astonished when nothing of value resided upon one of the head Nobles of their township, but Leaf would ensure that the legacy of his father was not summarized by an object. A heat flushed through Leaf’s body as angry thoughts began to simmer, but he cooled his temper to remain in control and to appear blissfully unaware. He was already entrusted with the biggest secret of New Eden Township. He could retain another.

Laurel’s hand clasped his, and he looked down and offered

a reassuring smile as they left their home. He squinted his eyes in the mid-day sunlight, listening to Willow cry as she stepped beside him. Mourners had gathered in the clearing, the sounds of quiet and muffled cries reaching his ears as his family descended the stairs to the biodome floor. Family groups lined up behind his and formed a procession. Brother Markus prayed in Latin as they marched with hoods high and heads low to the prepared funeral pyre placed next to The Rows.

The cool air of the forest enveloped them as they traveled the dirt path, and a gentle bio-wind released a bouquet of autumn leaves to spiral through the air and rain upon their bodies. The mournful wind continued to breeze and the woolen blanket Laurel placed upon their father flapped, threads dancing in the air. The path eventually wound to The Orchard and into the meadow that framed The Rows, the agricultural gardens that nourished the community.

A large metal structure punctured with sizeable holes had been wheeled into the meadow from the undertaker's shop, filled with ceremonial wood and juniper branches. Additional juniper branches lined the outside of the metal frame for the community to set upon his father. Tall lit torches placed in the soil were positioned at each corner to mark the four cardinal directions, the wispy smoke ascending to the dome ceiling like souls released to Heaven. The ceremony bearers lowered the litter upon the prepared wood and then stood to the side as all the families encircled the funeral pyre.

Brother Markus stood before his father and began to pray in a loud voice, "Thank you Heavenly Father for gifting us with Joel Watson, an extraordinary and honorable man. His life will forever bless our souls, and his memory will remain alive through the love and good deeds we extend to one another. It is with a heavy but thankful heart that we commit his spirit unto you." The Holy Scriptures pressed against the monk's heart as he lifted his free hand and gave the sign of the cross. In quiet, somber voices the community chanted, "Amen." Brother Markus met Leaf's eyes and nodded for him to come forward.

Leaf glanced furtively at The Elements, each face creased and shadowed with grief. There were no obvious indicators that they or their families had placed the card on his father. Could it

have been a resident from the village? His thoughts had been lost to the woods for a period, and he had not greeted those who came to pay his father respect. Although, Leaf's apartment had only been officially open to the Noble families.

He stood before his father's body and swallowed nervously. Leaf reached out and placed his hand in one pocket, revealing it was empty, and then performed the same task on the other. Those gathered reflected mild confusion, including the Noble houses. This was the first time an object was not found upon the deceased before cremation. Objects were even found on newborns. Willow placed a hand over her mouth in astonishment and met his gaze with large eyes. Leaf maintained a steady countenance, ignoring the reactions, and turned toward Brother Markus for further instruction.

"May the elder matriarchs come forth."

Four women in their late sixties and seventies came forward, the lead carrying a folded shroud in her hands. Practiced precision guided their movements and they quickly wrapped the ceremonial cloth around his father in several layers. Once their occupation was complete, they each picked up a juniper branch and placed it on top of his father's body, bowing as they did so. The community formed lines on either side of the funeral pyre, placing juniper twigs and branches upon the shrouded body, bowing before his father's corpse.

When the last family paid their respects, the Fire Element came forward and provided Leaf an unlit torch. Leaf straightened and approached the burning torch representing North, the cardinal direction that signified the Earth Element. He extended his arm and watched as a flame sparked to life, burning brightly and smoking heavily. With a shaky arm, he faced the funeral pyre and slowly lowered the torch until the flame connected with the juniper branches. The twigs and branches quickly became consumed with fire, veiling the pyre in thick smoke, and the crackling roar of burning wood rushed in his ears.

He dropped the torch onto the funeral pyre and took a step back before his knees gave way and he knelt before his father, touching his forehead to a verdant patch of earth. Sorrow convulsed through Leaf's entire body, and his shoulders shook, trembling beneath the weight of his grief and the weight of

responsibility.

Leaf needed to make a decision. His father's voice reverberated throughout the corners of his mind to leave and abandon the community while Leaf's gut shouted to remain and uphold his new position. Both were terrifying situations, most especially in light of the card in his pocket. Slowly Leaf lifted his head and glanced at Willow who stared at the fire in a trance, her face a perfect storm of grief. His pulse began to calm in his chest, quieting his raging thoughts; and Leaf anguished over which path to take until a visceral knowledge appeared and marked the map outlining his future. Leaf knew exactly where he should go and what he should do.

His sister turned her head and met his gaze, arching a single eyebrow, the flames of the funeral pyre flickering in her eyes.

LEGACY



Jesikah Sundin is a sci-fi/fantasy writer mom of three nerdlets and devoted wife to a gamer geek. In addition to her family, she shares her home in Monroe, Washington with a red-footed tortoise, two gerbils, and a collection of seatbelt purses. She is addicted to coffee, laughing, Doc Martens... Oh, and the forest is her happy place.

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