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Category: Novel Writing

The Price of War

Brief summary:

The Price of War is a story of tragedy and victory. It is good over evil, bravery over cowardice, and love over hate. Selene, a young Greek girl, struggles to survive when it seems she has lost everything. Her story takes place during the time of the Roman Empire. She experiences much danger, but through it all, a friendly hand is there to help. At the beginning of the story, Selene's life is great. But when an angry man plots revenge on her family for the death of his son, she must learn to survive on the run. After a house fire, in which Selene believes her family perished, she is convinced she is alone in the world. Zephyr, a young Greek boy, enters her life. They are kidnapped, chased, attacked, and injured as they try to escape the clutches of their enemy. Eventually, Selene learns the fate of her family, and she and Zephyr make the journey across the Great Sea. Not everyone is at peace with the truth. Selene's brother, Orpheus, cannot accept the truth that the others know. His hatred pushes him to plan evil consequences. The price of war is steep, and many fall victim to it. Zephyr and Selene fall in love. Before they marry, the whole story of the bravery of Zephyr's father must be revealed. However, Orpheus is yet another victim of war and he has an evil plan in place.

Excerpt:

Chapter 1

“Hurry up Selene!” cried lotus-eyed Iris. “We’re late. Mother won’t be very happy.” Selene, a small, pretty Athenian girl of thirteen, smiled in response, her sea-green eyes sparkling. She pulled her blue tunic over her head while a slave tied her sandals.

“Mistress, please stand still.” her slave pleaded.

“Sorry, Ada,” Selene murmured. “I’m just so excited!”

“I know, mistress. But how am I supposed to fix your hair if you keep bouncing around?” “I’m sorry. I’ll try to hold still.”

It took a little longer to fix Selene’s long copper hair. Ada’s skillful fingers wove Selene’s hair so many different ways that Iris soon lost track. She watched silently as Ada twisted in many different colors and kinds of flowers – pink-white almond blossoms, blood-red anemones, and yellow daffodil trumpets. To finish off the effects of Selene’s hair, Ada added a small sprig of violet to compliment Selene’s eyes. After they were finished, Selene looked in the mirror, and gave Ada a hug.

“Thank you, Ada. You are my best friend. I wish we could live as equals.”

Right before they walked downstairs, Ada said, “Mistress, I have a gift for you.” She quickly grabbed a small package from behind a chair and handed it to Selene. Iris watched as Selene unwrapped it. It was a lovely hair comb made of white seashells and delicate blue plumbago blooms.

Selene sighed with pleasure and hugged Ada. “Thank you very much, Ada. It’s beautiful. Your skill in jewelry-making amazes me. One day, you will be able to buy your freedom.”

Hugging her slave-friend once more, Selene skipped down the stairs with Iris right behind her.

As they walked down the stairs Selene thought about Ada. She was a pretty, young, barbarian girl. She had light skin, blond hair, which was a rare color, and blue eyes. She was twelve years old, tall, and strong. She never spoke much about her homeland, but ever since she had been brought into Selene’s life, they had been firm friends. They did just about everything together. They had the same interests, they had the same birth month, and they even shared the same love for beauty and creativity. When Ada would get in trouble for a mistake, Selene would always say, “If Ada must be punished, so must I.” And though he never said anything, Selene’s father was

always proud of her loyalty; even to a slave.

Selene came out of her thoughts just as their mother Eos met them at the foot of the stairs. Her brown eyes flashing, she said, "I told you girls to hurry your preparations for dinner. Our guests have already arrived."

Selene tried to explain, "I'm sorry, Mother, I just had to..."

"Not now, Selene," Eos interrupted, "you girls can explain later." She hurried them into the atrium, the large courtyard in the center of their traditional Greek house.

The girls found a roomful of guests talking quietly and sipping fresh wine. Excusing themselves from their conversations, four young men walked over to the sisters. "So, you two finally got here," the oldest of the young men, Perseus, teased.

"Well at least we took the time to make ourselves presentable." responded Selene with a slight grin.

They all laughed as Perseus blushed and looked down at his muddy clothes. "I didn't know that it was going to rain. Plus, it started raining when I was half way here. And I didn't want to miss your birthday. After all it's not every day your little sister turns thirteen."

"Well I'm glad that you are home, especially after these long five years without you," Eos said. "I am glad to be home too, Mother," he replied. The other five children laughed as their mother embraced Perseus.

Hearing the familiar laughter of his six children, Chiron turned from his animated exchange with Endimion. A huge, dark man with a sparse black beard and one blinded eye, Endimion also had a scar running down his cheek.

He looked startled at the sound of Chiron's children laughing. As Chiron stepped over to join his family, Endimion muttered to himself, "It must be nice to hear children laughing all of the time. I wouldn't know. Pericles certainly paid the ultimate price in this petty war."

Chiron smiled proudly as he turned to face the guests. "Friends and neighbors, we want to thank you for being here this evening as we celebrate my daughter's thirteenth birthday."

Wine and laughter flowed freely that evening, and after the last guest had stumbled out the door, Perseus came up to Selene and said, "Sister, we all pitched in and bought you something. It's in the barn." The boys led her out of the house, through the sweet smelling garden, into the dark interior of the barn, to the last stall on the left.

From the hall she could hear the animal breathing. Moonlight fell across the silhouette of the creature in a dim glow. "Oh," Selene breathed. "She's beautiful." As she gazed at the soft, white back of the pony, she said, "I'll name her Aphrodite, after the goddess of beauty."

After several hours spent with Aphrodite, in and outside the barn, Selene went back to the house where Iris gave her a green cloak of the softest wool she had ever felt. Her mother gave her a brooch, with a bright emerald in the middle, to match the cloak. At the end of the evening, Chiron gave her a shiny dagger, perfect for her small hand. This simple gift marked her entrance into adulthood, for she was now grown up enough to carry a weapon and learn the ways of self-protection.

For the time being, however, Selene felt that her life was perfect. She had loving parents and wonderful siblings. And she had just enjoyed her best birthday ever!

She had no idea how much her life was about to change.

Two weeks later, during dinner, Chiron told his family how the war was going. As a child, Selene knew that her father was an important man in the Roman army, but she had never really bothered to ask him what he did. Now that she was an adult, she asked, "Father, what do you do when you go away?"

He sighed sadly and replied, "I was waiting for you to ask me someday, Selene. I have tried to keep your mother and sister away from the reality of this war. But, now I think you all need to hear the truth. I am a Praefectus Legionis. This simply means that I am the highest ranking officer in the Roman army, in this part of the Roman Empire – your mother knows this much. What she doesn't know, and what is now very important, is that all of you are in constant danger because you are my family."

"How many soldiers do you command?"

"I command all of the soldiers here in Athens. It is a great responsibility and a great burden to lead so many men into war."

"Listen closely." At this point he lowered his voice, and the family leaned closer. "I can only tell you this. The war is going very badly for the Roman army. Even though we have extra troops, we're losing good men daily. I have decided that if things have not changed for the better in a fortnight, you girls are going to the summer villa in Africa."

"What of the boys?" Eos gasped.

"The boys will join me," sighed Chiron.

Though she didn't say anything else, Eos knew that there really was no other choice. If her sons went to war, she may never see them again.

The reason to flee to safety came all too soon. During the darkest part of the night before they left for the safety of Carthage, Selene and Iris woke to the smell of smoke and the frightened neighing of horses. Selene's first

thought, when she heard the neighing, was for her beloved Aphrodite. The sisters looked at each other thoroughly alarmed. They quickly tied on their sandals, wriggled into tunics, and threw on cloaks. Without thinking, Selene put on her new green cloak and matching brooch. She raced to the barn to free the trapped horses, especially Aphrodite, while Iris went to locate the rest of their family. It wasn't long before the neighbor's houses were burning and the air was full of smoke. As soon as the horses were set free, Selene stood by Aphrodite, watching for her family, yelling out their names, but to no avail. She had never felt so alone. She waited and waited for some sign that her parents or brothers and sister were alive. Pacing around her nervous pony for what seemed like days, Selene could wait no longer. She flew across the yard toward her still burning home in search of Mother . . . Father . . . Perseus . . . Iris . . . someone . . .

Suddenly, Selene felt a gentle, firm hand on her arm and she was jerked to a halt. She turned and saw a strange man standing beside her. He was not a handsome man, but there was something about him that caught Selene's attention. He seemed to have a slight glow about him. Was it from the burning debris that used to be her home? He was dressed in a brown tunic and his light brown hair fell loosely about his face. Glaring at him for jerking her back, she yanked her arm out of his grasp and cried, "Don't hold me back! I must try to find my family in there!" She whirled to run, but he caught her arm again and said in a deep, kind, voice, "It is all right. You shall see them again, Child. Take this cup of water before you go, though." She sighed and took the cup, her throat suddenly burning with thirst. When the water touched her tongue it was like the freshness of spring. It was the coolest, the sweetest, and the most refreshing cup of water she had ever tasted. The liquid immediately took away her thirst.

Just as she turned to run to the house, a loud cracking interrupted the peace in her mind. Right before her eyes, she saw the roof of her beloved home come down with a thundering CRASH!

As the first light of a hazy, silent dawn peaked over the hills, Selene went around to the back of the pile of rubble in her frantic search for her family. She didn't see anything until... there, half buried under the massive outer wall, were the charred remains of seven people. Falling to her knees in anguish, she now knew that she was truly alone.