

ENDURE

↬ A DEFY NOVEL ↬

SARA B. LARSON



SCHOLASTIC PRESS

New York

Copyright © 2016 by Sara B. Larson

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher.

For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Larson, Sara B., author.

Endure : a Defy novel / Sara B. Larson. — First edition.

pages cm

Sequel to: Ignite.

Summary: Alexa and King Damian are engaged to be married, but the kingdom of Antion is besieged, their friend Rylan is a prisoner of the enemy, and Alexa has not told Damian that she is at the mercy of the evil Rafe, bound to obey one command of his choosing — but now Alexa must travel deep into enemy territory and confront an army of black sorcerers to rescue Rylan.

ISBN 978-0-545-64490-7 (jacketed hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Magic — Juvenile fiction. 2. Kings and rulers — Juvenile fiction. 3. Rescues — Juvenile fiction. 4. Conspiracies — Juvenile fiction. 5. Adventure stories. [1. Magic—Fiction. 2. Kings, queens, rulers, etc. — Fiction. 3. Rescues — Fiction. 4. Conspiracies — Fiction. 5. Adventure and adventurers — Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.L323953En 2016

813.6—dc23

[Fic]

2015015932

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 16 17 18 19 20

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, January 2016

Book design by Elizabeth B. Parisi

❧ PREFACE ❧

Damian

MY FATHER TAUGHT me that the only way to ensure your subjects' loyalty is to make them fear you. He used cruelty and terror as tools to ensure his power. My mother, on the other hand, taught my brother and me something entirely different: A king — a *good* king — must be who his people *need* him to be.

I live by her words.

For the grieving woman, I am compassionate, I am kind. To the generals who lead my armies, I am firm and absolute. To the daughters of the royal court, I am courteous but, of necessity, aloof.

I've spent a lifetime practicing, becoming who I must be to survive. Hiding in plain sight, always acting, always playing a part. There are times when I fear that I'll lose *me*, my *true* self, in the haze of the facade. But that fear doesn't matter to anyone besides myself. It doesn't build homes for the orphans and women left broken by my father's reign of terror. It doesn't put Antion back together, or stop us from getting dragged into another unwanted war. The only thing that counts is that I carry on and do what I must.

So that is what I do.

Until night falls and I lie in my bed, with the weight of a kingdom bearing down on me, trying to breathe under the pressure of

all that I hope to do, all that I want to accomplish — all that I fear. And that is when the smell of gardenia mixed with the coppersy tang of blood comes to haunt me.

The memory of my mother is both happiness *and* terror intertwining into a tangle of comfort and horror. I try to erase the bad with the good. Her arm draped around my shoulder at night, a comfortable weight. The remnants of her gardenia perfume in my nose, with Victor on her other side. Her voice flowing over us along with the blanket of darkness as night fell. She started all of her stories with “Once, a long time ago . . .” Her Blevonese accent made her words different, almost magical. She painted pictures for me and Victor, holding us in the protective wings of her arms, curled up together on her massive bed. Her stories always ended well, sending us off into dreams, warm in the comfort of happily ever after. But her gentle life ended in a tapestry of blood, at the hands of my father. Nightmares drenched in dark, dripping crimson have been my constant companion ever since.

My story, if someone were to tell it, would begin with her voice.

Once, a prince was born. He was a second son, who worshipped his older brother as all younger sons do — even if it was in secret most of the time. His mother adored both of her children. She told them stories; she showed them sorcery. She was magic, to this young prince. And when he found that he, too, could do strange and wonderful things, she taught him to hide his secret from everyone — even his brother. The same brother who teased him mercilessly, but was the first to stand up to anyone else who dared look sideways at the young prince. She taught him that magic was a death sentence in the world his father had created. It became a marvelous game to him — one that he was determined to win, even if he wasn't quite sure what the

prize was. She promised that when he got older, she would tell him all the secrets of her people and the magic they both wielded.

When they were together, they were happy.

And then his father, the king, took her away. One moment his mother was looking at him, all her secret pleadings and advice swimming in the tears that glistened in her eyes, and the next she was gone. Murdered. No one could stand up to the king, not even his own sons. The older brother held the young prince in his arms that night. In the dark silence where once had been their mother's voice and touch, they sobbed as though they were still children, even though they were halfway grown into men.

War started. The prince's life was never the same.

And then his brother was taken from him, too.

One by one, the prince lost every person he had ever loved, until he was completely alone, save for a healer who hid deep in the palace with his half brother — to bring him the bloodroot that suppressed his abilities, concealing his secret to save his life.

The prince had no choice except to change. He buried who he truly was and pretended to be someone else. He grew; he became an adult. He continued to pretend, but inside he dreamed — and he plotted.

Until the day a young woman joined his personal guard — a girl pretending to be a boy. He knew her secret, as all sorcerers had the ability to sense a person's true identity — male, female, sorcerer or not. He feared for her, thinking that Iker, the black sorcerer working for the king, would know and punish her. But nothing happened — at least at first. She proved her ability time and again, and the black sorcerer left her alone. For months and months, the prince watched her and found himself dreaming of things that could never be. She had suffered; she had endured loss; she wore sadness like a second skin. But she still had her brother — her twin, Marcel.

For the first time in years, the prince yearned to be his true self instead of the persona he'd been forced to adopt to protect himself from his father's machinations. He fought the urge to let his defenses down with her. He didn't dare. Too much rested on his shoulders.

And then her brother died and Iker made his move, choosing her to guard his door day and night. The prince realized his father suspected him — and Iker was using the girl as a way to manipulate and threaten him.

Unbeknownst to anyone except a very select few, the prince had put a plan into action — a dangerous plan to try and overthrow his father and stop the atrocities against the people of Antion and the war that never should have started. And that prince . . . he decided to risk everything when he came out in the dead of night to speak with his guard. When slowly, carefully, he let her see him for who he truly was.

And together, they remade the world into something brighter. Together, they brought back hope to the people of Antion. Together, they gave his kingdom freedom.

That is how my mother would have told my story. I wonder if she knows the ending — if she still watches me. If she's proud of the man I've tried to become, or the king I am.

We succeeded, Alexa and I. Despite my fear, I let myself love her. And together we beat Iker and my father. The young prince who never should have inherited the throne was suddenly the king of Antion.

But once again threats amass all around us, attempting to tear us apart — to rip my kingdom to pieces. I refuse to let them succeed. I will raise Antion from the depths of depravation my father drove us into. And I will not lose *her*, no matter the cost.

I am Damian, the king of Antion, and no one will ever take someone I love from me again and live.