

## Chapter 3

### “A Child’s Mind”



Sarantos allowed his eyes to adjust. He tried to palpate what the wizard said existed inside these caves - the disorienting things that were lurking around in the dark were palpable.

Something moved to his left, something fast and human sized. He was sure of it and that thought unnerved him as he tried to focus his eyes on the blackest corners of the cave. Maybe, nothing was there he told himself. The colors were moving so fast that he couldn't be sure of anything at this moment.

The cave was like an optical illusion that threatened to stupefy him if he continued to stare at the brilliant delicacy of its contents. Inside this cave he was a child again, with eyes that could see with innocent bewilderment. He felt young and free. A feeling that hadn't been in the heart of him since the first time he and Leigh met. It seemed like it was an eternity ago. He'd felt giddy and childlike with butterflies moving inside his whole being every time she came within view on that magical first occasion. Since then he'd been lost looking in the rain for that childlike innocence again, because the rain drummed a steady rhythm into his very spirit that cleansed out the adult cynicism and harsh reality of the real world.

“Sarantos! Look out!”

Blayke's voice raced violently around the cavern echoing through his ears.

The wizard was suddenly in front of him lifting his staff and whispering a magic word. Light filled the cave and the creatures that used the darkness to hide were now cowering with unexpected vulnerability.

Sergio suddenly appeared next to one of these man-sized beasts. He spoke to it in the ancient language of the elves. The light appeared to blind it fiercely as its huge eyes blinked and its furry hands reached up to cover the closing eyelids. Their fur seized the colors of the cave, but in the brightness now on display it was just plain color. In the darkness when they moved, they created a sense of breathless confusion as they blended with the movement and motion of the colors that shifted around the cavern causing a dual emotional impression on any unsuspecting victims.

Sergio smiled and the creatures relaxed. “Their colors created a perplexing effect of movement as they quickly shifted about the cave. You perceived multiple colors that didn’t fit into the shifting of the caves colors and that created discombobulation and impaired reasoning. These gentle creatures are called, Prismas. It’s been about a hundred years since I’ve seen one. They hate the light.”

The wizard began chuckling. “Well, I’ve heard of them, but the last time I visited Shadow here I didn’t run into them.”



“Wallis?” A voice that sounded like it was at once in front of Sarantos, then in back of him, maybe also to the right and left of him spoke directly to the wizard. It carried a unisex vocal melody that moved with strength and gentleness.

“Hello, my friend,” said the wizard. Wallis toned down the light on the staff so the Prismas would feel more comfortable before he spoke again. “Have you seen anything come in from the other world?”

“Some human looking people. That’s all I saw, but there could have been more. I hid most of the

time, you know, in the shadows.”

The wizard laughed heartily. “You always did have a good sense of humor!”

Stitch was smiling and moved next to Sarantos. “Yes, I love being in caves again. Now, you might understand what makes this dwarf tick.”

“I always had some idea,” he replied.

Leigh slid her hand into his and Mika stood at Wallis’s side staring intently around the room. He had a feeling the cat loved this dark cave. She thrived in a nocturnal environment.

The Prismas had gathered around Sergio and were communicating quite well with him in the elfin language. Adela joined the creatures and while petting them, her voice almost sang as it rose with her own elfin words. Sarantos was curious about the Prismas ability to speak in the language of the elf.

Brad and Blayke moved about in a guarding formation. Protecting the group was at the top of Blayke’s agenda and he enlisted Brad to assist him so the rest of the group could communicate and relax. Clancy and Stanley had disappeared.

“Where’s this portal, then,” asked Wallis?

“You’ll find it on the north wall by the pool of doubt.”

“Come with me, Shadow and I’ll check out what’s been done. We’ll have to go through to the other side to...” His voice faded into the distance as he moved away from the group.

Mika sat down next to Sarantos. He knew they generally separated when the wizard parted from the group. It was more for communicating between the cat and wizard.

“Why do the Prismas speak elfin?”

Sergio looked at Sarantos and said, “That’s an interesting story, dear bard. These talented creatures were once pets to the elfin kingdom, similar to your house cats and dogs. Their high intelligence triggered an ethical war among the different races of the elves. They had their own thought and spirit, not to mention each had a unique personality. I suppose you could argue so do cats and dogs, but this was very different. The Prismas wanted to marry and have families and were able to achieve diplomatic representation to acquire what they desired. The war was similar to your civil war, but not as violent, nor as long lasting. Finally, they earned their freedom.”

“Wow, that’s a great story,” said Leigh. “I’d heard about the war many years ago, but never was it spoken about so elegantly and passionately. You were obviously on the side of the Prismas.”



Suddenly, Sergio was beside her and kissed her on her cheek. “Beautiful lady, I was. Was it that obvious?”

Leigh smiled sweetly and squeezed Sarantos hand. He decided to walk with her around the cave casually observing all of its beauty. Sergio of course followed right next to them.

“When I spoke to the Prismas, they mentioned to me that only a few humans came through the portal. Malek, their leader told me if anything else came through one of them would have surely

seen it. I’m afraid more went into your world than came into ours. The Prismas aren’t generally up this close to the opening in the caves and prefer to be in them much deeper; however, Shadow summoned them because he was afraid Sarantos.”

The comment made him smile. He thought about his childhood and remembered how a child will always believe, even in his own shadow. His mother would tell him never be afraid of your own shadow, because you can’t hide from it. It will

always find you. Now, here he was in a cavern with a real creature that was a shadow and afraid of actual physical entities. What a crazy role reversal!



Leigh was looking at him, tilted her head slightly, smiled harmlessly and said, “What’s so funny, Sarantos? You have a weird distant expression lit with humor.”

He stared into her eyes. “A child will always believe, Leigh. That’s what I was thinking. I miss being a child. I remember being a child and having a child’s mind that was so young and free! Even as adults, we should always hold onto at least a little piece of our child’s mind.”

She nodded and he could see the foggy sparkle in her eyes. They danced in harmony to the colorful cavern

twinkling with each new color.

“God, I love you,” he said softly.

“What’s not to love, she’s amazing,” Sergio said playfully.

Apparently, it wasn’t a private moment enough for the big ears of Sergio. Yet, Sarantos had to admit, the wizard was right in bringing him along. His abilities were absolutely undeniable.

Sarantos ignored Sergio’s comment and instead addressed the big cat. “Mika, is everything okay with Wallis? It seems he’s been gone quite a while.”

She was walking next to him, because when Wallis wasn’t around Mika took on the role of the guardian. He loved the cat and smiled with the recollection of their first meeting.

She purred and rubbed up against him. Her head was high enough to touch without bending down, so he ran his hand along her head and mildly massaged her ears.

“He’s fine. Wallis and Shadow have a lot of catching up to do, about things that come and go, planet noises both good and disruptive, not to mention things that go bump in the dark.” The cat had a sense of humor. “ I remember our first meeting as well, Sarantos. You were naked. Sometimes it still repulses me, whenever I think about it. My eyes still ache over that experience! But, I have to admit, I’m glad, in the end, you came with me through the portal.”

Sergio couldn’t stop laughing and Leigh was giggling.

He brought his top lip over his bottom and his brow wrinkled. “It wasn’t that funny.”

“Oh, I’m afraid it was, Sarantos.” Sergio could barely get out the words. “I’m quite good looking naked though. Right, Leigh?”

She bent over and laughed harder. That was all Sergio needed. “Poor woman.”



She laughed until she cried.

“I don’t think I’m speaking to the two of you the rest of this journey!”

Blayke and Brad moved in closer. “What’s going on over here,” asked Blayke.

“Can you keep it down a bit? We can’t hear if something approaches.” Brad said while gazing in the direction of the Prismas. “You know those creatures’ faces are so cute, but their body parts are kind of gross. Maybe, someone should introduce them to clothes?”

Mika gave out a loud roar, like a lion in a moment of flushed expression and Leigh grabbed at her side as the tears continued to flow. Sergio couldn't catch his breath, as he joined Leigh in a fit of sorts. It took them at least five minutes to get control of themselves. They couldn't look at each other for the next ten minutes or it would cause the tears to flow once more.

Wallis and Shadow eventually reappeared in the main cavern area where the group waited.

“Well, I think we are safe to say not many got in, however we'll need to locate and return the Deathdreamers and the Flacens. According to other cave dwellers four Deathdreamers and five Flacens escaped,” said Wallis.

Shadow said, “You'll need to take the plant with you by the water's edge before you enter the portal. It will act as a locator for the Flacens. It's their food. The Deathdreamers will be harder to find. They hide in dreams. You'll have to locate the dreams they find to crawl into and destroy the dream by creating a new one. It'll be tricky, but once that's done they'll immediately reappear back in their



natural habitat. They'll probably be mad that you came for them and try to escape the dream, so take some water from the pool to throw on them and trap them inside. You'll only need a drop.”

“Interesting,” said Leigh. “Is that plant called Pink Pinch?”

“Yes, it is,” replied Wallis.

“I'll be the one to gather that. I've four empty bags.”

“Good. Once we gather

three, someone will teleport them back. That's why there are so many of us. We might have to return what we find and I wasn't sure what we'll be up against on the other side. It's your world Sarantos and Brad so you'll be our guides. Are you both coming back?"

Although Sarantos felt excitement in returning to his world, this place had become his new home. He loved Leigh and finally found the enchantment he was looking for in his life.

"Yes, I'll be returning." He blurted without thinking about it a second longer. He kissed Leigh. "Nothing will make me change my mind, but I'm excited about the prospect of seeing my homeland and family." He turned to look at his long time friend.

Brad grinned and said, "I agree with Sarantos. I've found family here too. My mother died before I came here and I had no other family. Sarantos had always been like a brother to me. I love this world and even though the woman I love is married to a vampire, I can't leave now." He glared at Sergio, who was busy looking around and appeared not at all interested in the conversation, except for a slight grin that showed off a dimple in his left cheek.

"That's settled then. I'm glad, because you are both a big part of my world now and I honestly don't know what I'd do without you at this point." Wallis spun around and shouted for Adele, "Come here, Adele, my love. We're off."

She disengaged from her conversation with the Prismas and one of them held out something in its furry paw. She reached down to take it, then closed her hand around it and kissed the hairy creature on its shaggy face. The Prisma smiled and its huge teeth glowed distinctly in the cavern.

She was grinning back when she joined the group.

"Adele, we must be off. Each of you will get a vial of the water from the pool of doubt. The water will be in front of the portal." The wizard looked around in confusion. "Where's that dwarf? Stitch, where are you?"

"I don't know. I was so busy walking around, I hadn't noticed he was missing."

Blayke looked concerned. “Dwarf, where are you? Don’t make me look for you or I’ll pull you up to my size by your beard!” He spoke loud and his voice echoed off the walls. Anyone in the cavern should have heard his call.

“That blasted dwarf,” the wizard shouted!

“What’s all the commotion?” The dwarf asked as he appeared from around a stalagmite carrying several different types of small rocks. “This rock is great for nasty dart edges. Mind if I help myself to some of these, Shadow?”

“Be my guest, dwarf. We are kindred spirits. You may visit me and stay as long as you’d want, my cave dweller ally.”

The dwarf looked like someone painted a smile on his face, because it was the longest lasting grin Sarantos had ever seen on Stitch since they’d met over a year ago.



“Thanks, my new friend.” He reached into his pouch and pulled out a flask, opened the cap and guzzled. “That’s to our new found friendship. May it last until the death of this old dwarf!”

The wizard’s robes made a swish as he turned quickly, heading off in the direction of the portal. “Enough of this party atmosphere. We must go. Follow me.”

The wizard was gone so fast the only thing that could be seen heading off into the blackness was the light emanating from the top of his staff. Adele kept pace

with Wallis while Blayke and Stitch waited for the rest of them to follow, to protect the party from any back attacks. Mika nor Sergio could be seen or detected. Leigh and Brad walked beside Sarantos and it was a comfort for him. In the end he was glad they'd joined this new adventure.

His mind wandered as they hurried toward the portal. What would it be like back at home? He'd been gone for years, so he didn't know what to expect. Unlike Brad he still had family.

Were they still alive? Did they miss him? He'd found love and comfort in their eyes when he needed their help as a child. He was sheltered and protected by them. They nourished him into adulthood. His confidence was built on the security of being carried by that feeling of someone always being there yet still allowing him to enjoy his youth and freedom. Now, he was returning to his home world that still encompassed some vague elements of that youthful protection. But, he'd grown into a different person who needed a different type of security, with new friends like Blayke and Mika. More importantly he was in love with a woman that was more mature than any he'd ever met on Earth. She had an uncanny ability to adapt and live on her own. Her depth and evolution had helped develop in him, a keener sense of responsibility to others and himself, as well.

A flapping noise startled him out of his dreamy thoughts. He looked around . . . bats.



Bats were amazing creatures and he watched while Wallis held his staff up higher to check out the commotion. Hundreds of bats hung around the stalactites. The size of their group seemed to have disturbed them.

Blayke was clearly uncomfortable. “Dwarf, I don't know how you can stand the underground. These little creatures give me the creeps.”

“What? The big man can wield two swords at a time against more than one larger opponent, but these tiny mammals disturb you? My friend,

how ridiculous does that sound coming out of your mouth?” The dwarf began to chuckle.

“Maybe, it does sound ridiculous - it reminds me of the vampires. Truthfully, I had an easier time with vampire bats. You knew what they wanted and I could work with them more on my own terms, on my turf. Down on the ground we walk in their world and there are so many. If the light goes out, they see better and use sonar also known as echolocation. They can use that to judge size and density of their prey, as well. It bounces off of things and feeds them the information they need.”

“I wasn’t nervous until you said that,” Leigh laughed.

“We’re here.” The wizard’s voice reverberated in the silence of the cavern causing some disturbance amongst the bats, but they quickly went back to their hanging out positions.

The pool of doubt was worthy of its name. It was unsettled that it was a pool. There was no reflection from the wizard’s light or the colors that rippled through the cavern. In fact, had he not told them it was a pool, it was uncertain they would



have figured it out. Maybe the elf, cat, and dwarf would have been the only ones that might’ve known. He understood why Shadow had shown the wizard the pool. Although it was surrounded with a rocky terrain and the pool seemed to have three levels, it was really hard to tell it was a pool.

When they finally all stood around the pool the wizard continued to speak, “Gather the water, but be careful this pool holds mystic secrets and the depth is unknown. We’ll have to walk up the rocks on the left side of the pool and when we reach the third level, I will disappear under a waterfall. You’ll need to follow me. The

portal is behind it and is our passage to earth. Stay close and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Watch each other very carefully.”

The wizard bent down and filled a flask. Sarantos watched as the flask seemed to vanish for a moment and then somehow reappear. He wouldn't want to be lost under the pool of doubt.

Adele went next, as the wizard proceeded to move up the stones a short way before turning to wait for the group.

“Be on guard. The stones are slippery.”

The wizard continued while they all filled up a flask and followed him up the rock formation. The group did quite well and were sure-footed as the wizard reached the top and disappeared behind what could only be described as a waterfall. The water was so dark with no reflection to allow for signs of obvious movement. Adele lit her staff and moved to the side so everyone could follow her light to the falls.

There were no shadows this close to the pool and when Leigh vanished behind the water he hurried close behind her so she wasn't out of his sight for too long.

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He stood in a huge cave that was about the size of a six-bedroom home. The portal gave off an iridescent glow that shimmered, faded and shimmered again. At least he thought that was the portal. It was the only light he could see except for the staff of the wizard.

Mika and Sergio were already inside and stood next to the portal. Leigh took his hand and then a familiar voice said, “Hello, Sarantos.”

No, it was Stanley. Where he was, Clancy wasn't usually far behind.

“Hey, my magic portal!”

“Impressive,” said Sarantos.

“Yes, impressive,” added Leigh.

He hoped they weren't coming with them. The rest of the group made it inside and they all walked up to the portal. It felt strange to be this close to it, he wasn't sure why though?

“You two will need to stay here, Stanley. We might have trouble and you won't want to be a part of this trouble! If you could kindly wait here and make sure the portal stays intact.”

“Stanley, the wizard's given me a job. I'm officially an apprentice to a wizard!”

“Oh, Clancy you're not an apprentice.”

“Yes, I am!”

“When it shimmers go in quickly. Each person must wait until it shimmers. Don't go in when it fades out.” The wizard said and was gone through the portal.

Adele followed. Then one by one, they all jumped into the portal leaving behind Clancy arguing with Stanley.

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The cool night air hit Sarantos in the face as he stepped out of the portal.

The wizard was walking around on a ship and looked quite confused. Sarantos noticed the wooden ship was not the standard design of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“This can't be right, Wallis. Where are we?”



“Well, I’m not sure. It’s clearly earth. We are standing on a ship of some sort, but it appears no one is around. Odd, almost like a ghost ship.” The wizard frowned.

They all became unnerved when a loud moan made them jump and go on guard.

As Sarantos turned towards Leigh, she was pointing at some writing that clearly read, *The Mary Celeste*.