

Chapter 1 “Pain Of The Past”

Sarantos grabbed Leigh’s hand, squeezing it before pulling her closer.



It was winter in Yarrowtopia and a cool breeze suddenly rose from the nearby lake innocently nipping at his nose and cooling his cheeks with a frosty touch. He could feel them turn redder.

Leigh leaned into his shoulder snuggling her face under his warm blue scarf. Snowflakes the size of golf balls gently fell across the landscape of barren trees, with green spruce dancing in color against the cloudy grey sky in defiance of the winter’s monochromatic drabness.

It was a picture perfect scene. He bent down and kissed the top of her head smelling her fresh wintertime minty hair. Words to describe his feelings for her and how much he loved her seemed to sneak away mischievously and fade into the white drifts of snow. There was no expression worthy enough or bright enough for her touch in his world. Instead he floated above them looking down at the moment and remembered far too many moments that had gone by—the pain of the past. In that instant, he understood the reason why.

It was her that made his heart sing and tears sting like never before. Those times they were separated when he couldn’t live without her kiss—when he thought he would die and never kiss her again. The pain of the past haunted him and he knew not what he should do to eliminate those raw memories and replace them with newly created ones.

He could feel the warmth of her body as the fog in his head dissipated. He turned her around so that he could look deep into her eyes.

“Leigh, my mind won’t forget the past. Being without you has been imprinted so deeply inside of me that sometimes I can’t breathe as panic sets in my heart with the fear of losing you.”

She politely smiled at him causing his knees to immediately weaken. It was as if his heart reached out from his chest and wrapped them both in love surrounding them while almost also enthusiastically tipping them over.

“Marry me, Leigh. Right now! Today, under the falling snow before your mind has time to realize what I ask of you and say no.”

She never stopped smiling and nodded her head graciously as her twinkling eyes filled with tears. His heart almost burst with joy.

He summoned the wizard who appeared expeditiously before them with Adele, who immediately hugged both of them before standing next to Leigh as a proud witness to their love.

Before he knew it, he said, “I do...I do,” until he was screaming it again louder and louder for the whole world to hear.



A sharp pain went through his foot.

“Well, I don’t and I’m afraid that’s all that matters.”

He quickly opened his eyes. Brad stood over him laughing.

No...this can’t be. It was so perfect!

Brad held up a staff and said, “I had to jab your foot with this fine instrument to stop your incessantly uncontrollable ranting like a berserk madman. It was a

nice prod, if I do say so.”

He dropped his head into his hands and struggled to hold back the tears. Tears of a fake joy, those were the ones that stung the most.

“Sorry, buddy. What’s going on?”

“I miss Leigh. I wish she didn’t have to go with Adele and help with Deanna’s wedding plans.” He looked out the window and watched the giant snowflakes fall. His heart felt like it was about to crack as he struggled to hold back his sadness.

“She didn’t have to go, did she? Heaven knows that Deanna has enough servants to assist her with everything she could possibly need.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right Brad but she wanted to be a part of it. That’s who she is and part of what makes me love her so much. It just seems colder around here without her warm infectious smile.”

“I know, buddy. I feel that same way about Star. We’ve grown so close over this past six months and I’m thinking of asking her to marry me. What do you think about that, my friend?”

“What? You hardly know her.” He stammered, while inside his own skin, he ached for his own shortcomings about making decisions when it came to love. Brad knew what he wanted when it came to love and jumped blindly into its burning flames, not ever afraid of getting burnt. Sarantos admired his ability to find love so soon after being singed by the flame of a former love. He thought his friend would have never recovered from Muriele. Yet, here he was fully recovered after such a short time and in love once again.

Brad patted him on the back and said, “Sarantos, the wizard wants us all at breakfast this morning, and it seems we have something big going on. Adventure has been a while in coming, although I kind of enjoyed the quiet calm.” Brad walked to the door, turned around and smiled. “I know all I need to know,” he said as he winked and left the room.

Breakfast was laid out on the old wooden table, as steam rose up into the air moving playfully around the dark, but cosy room. The large fire spat now and

again adding warmth to his heart. He'd grown quite fond of this room and all the old pieces that made it unique, the wizard not withstanding.



Brad, Sergio, Muriele, Switch, Blayke and Halo were starting to fill up their plates with bread, fresh churned butter, warm apple bake, eggs that were scrambled to perfection, a sweet sausage drizzled in maple syrup and slices of pumpkin bread filled with cream cheese. His mouth watered as he filled up his mug with hot fresh coffee and sat among his friends. Two empty chairs sat to the side of him but

before he could guess who they were for, Wallis came into the room with a woman he'd never seen until now.

She was short and slender and dressed in dark brown leather, a forest green cloak draped down to her ankles. As she threw back a snow-covered hood, her black hair tumbled around her rosy face that still held the abrasive marks of the unforgiving cold outside. Her head turned and in one quick glance, dark penetrating eyes appeared to capture all she needed to know about each person at the table. She had a pleasant, but stern face that held struggle and information far older than her years.



She went toward the door and removed her cloak hanging it on a rack while tapping her high soft suede boots on the mat to remove leftover snow. “Wizard, I can take you there, but I warn you it’s very dangerous.” Her voice was soft and secretive, almost a whisper. Her shiny hair fell to her waist and it quickly covered several bands on her arms and a wide black belt around her that held many small sacks and bags. “I will need to bring my bow, knives and darts, not to mention I’ll have to prepare myself with herbs, potions and salves. It will take a week before I’m ready for sure.” She moved to the table and sat down next to Sarantos. “Wizard, it will be

free of charge. I owe the elves my life.”

The wizard’s face lit up. “Everyone, this is Gabby, our guide and a very gifted ranger with skills that surpass even some of the elves,” he winked.

“Never,” she said, as her dark eyes danced with the slightest amusement.

Sarantos wondered if he was the only one confused by the wizard’s comment. “Wallis, can you please explain why we need a guide?”

The ancient wizard sat down next to Gabby, buttered some bread, poured himself some coffee and appeared to be taking his time answering the question while he continually nodded his head and smiled like a marionette. After a few bites of bread and several long swigs of hot coffee, he glanced at Sarantos. “We are about to embark on a new journey, my friend.” His eyes glowed with excitement as he looked deeply into each face that sat around the breakfast table. “I’ve missed travelling, but now we undertake a great adventure that is quite personal to me. I’ve decided to call it, In Search for Life, yes...that has a nice ring to it,” he said while looking off into the distance seemingly visiting a place only he could visualize. “We are going in search of a flower that weeps to help return Sergio to his life and the woman he loves. Gabby, please elaborate.”

She nodded and quickly finished her eggs, wiped her mouth and looked over the people in front of her. “We will be headed to a rather large expanse of land that is uninhabited called, Molehill.”



Switch inhaled, his eyes bulged and he quit eating. He glanced at the wizard. “Are you mad? We can’t go there! It’s not fit for man or beast—that’s why it’s uninhabited.”

The only person that spoke next was Gabby and she ignored the dwarf entirely, as though he never interrupted her at all.

“Inside Molehill is a rather dark and mysterious woodland called, Woodworm Woods that supposedly has a unique flower that weeps. It’s named, Pleurer. We must retrieve it and return it to a giant that guards the gem of life, only then can we utilize the gem to restore Sergio to

his true self. This flower is cherished above all things by the giant and the only thing he'd be willing to deal with."

"I've heard of these woods and I never thought I would say this but I agree with the dwarf. It's too dangerous and from what I've heard there's no guarantee that we could even locate this flower - it resides in stories belonging to myth," Blayke said with real concern in his voice.

Again, Gabby ignored the interruption and continued. "Legend has it that this flower was created from the last tear of a female giant as she lay dying in the arms of her husband, Mandrake. She was a healer of her people, beautiful both in spirit and in appearance. She was with child. Giants are known to have long lives so they only have the ability to have children every twenty years. This child would have been her first. She was killed in the Great War that removed giants from this land; forever...their home was Molehill. It's been cursed ever since." Gabby paused and took a drink. "Mandrake carried his wife's body through the woods and over the hills of Molehill to the sea of Pathos where he hired a shipmaster to carry him and his love to a secluded island that only appears once a month and then is hidden from view. No one knows when it will emerge or where it goes when it's not seen. Some say it moves in and out of another dimension, others say it hides in a deep magical fog. There is only one thing that is agreed upon about the island. To go there is certain death!"



The dwarf's eyes appeared to leap out of his head as he leaned in closer to Gabby and said, "Well, why would this flower mean so much to Mandrake if it was the exact place where his beloved wife died in his arms? How can we negotiate with such a gift?"

"I understand your misgivings, dwarf, but there is more to the story. The giant Mandrake returned to Woodworm after the burial of his beloved wife to find and bring back the flower to his home. The giant believed that this flower was a part of his wife and wanted it close to his

heart where he could look upon her beauty within the depths of the flower's warm colors. Legend has it he wandered the woods for months without food and little to no water. The poor giant never found the flower. He had blisters on his feet that rose up and painfully opened up over and over again. Some say when they saw the giant returning to his ship his feet were so bloody and his heart was so heavy, his head almost hung to the ground. He was dirty and frail, yet no one challenged him, because his love was so great the people were afraid he would angrily turn on them and seek revenge thus turning him into the greatest destroyer imaginable. So, they left well enough alone. The damage they'd done was already history and a regrettable one at that. Strange isn't it, dwarf? How mankind can react on a whim and then pay the consequences for one moment in history for all of eternity?"

The wizard nodded and the dwarf slowly sat back in his chair. "Well, I hate to say it, Gabby, but it's not just man, but the dwarves have been known to do the same thing."

Gabby looked deep into his eyes with an intensity that could almost see the past destruction of the dwarf colonies. Her face was solemn when she spoke next. "The giant returned to his new home, alone and devastated. His anguish was so great and he cried so many tears that an opening the size of the giant's head appeared below his feet. He finally stopped crying when the hole glittered with the magnitude of a million gems. He lifted only one crystal out of the ground that had filled the hole completely. It shone with all colors and threw images of light around the entire island. A gift from his love it was! It is in his home where he guards it still to this day. The giants set up their city around the gem and Mandrake sits on a throne behind it and only he has the right to allow those that make it there to be healed by the gem. Yes, my friends the great irony is that the gem has the ability to heal all illnesses and is usually only a gift for the giants themselves to use. Mandrake is in such grief over it, because the very gem he created from her love can heal all but her, because she was murdered first in the Great War. He believes it is his wife's



spirit that has given this gift to his people and she speaks to him to let him know if those that come before him are worthy to be healed."

Gabby lowered her head in sadness. The wizard patted her on the shoulder and he said quietly, "I remember the war quite well. I fought in that war on the side of the giants. They were a kind race and offered a lot of joy to this land that will never be felt again. I know Mandrake and hope

that we can find this gift for him. This journey, my friends will hopefully make two wrongs a right, at least my heart hopes it will.”

Brad suddenly became animated with life. “Alright, wizard when do we start on this new journey, In Search of Life?”

The wizard turned toward Brad and nodded. “Very soon, we’ll let Gabby get what she needs and upon her return we’ll begin our quest, but only a few of us will make this trip. You, Brad will stay here and assist in the everyday affairs. I need to know that my home is cared for. Can I count on you?”



“I can’t say I’m happy about being left behind on such an important adventure, but I will do what is needed of me, wizard. I will work with Brazon to decide on which potions you may need to take with you. We will prepare for your trip.”

The wizard smiled and said, “Thanks Brad and tell Brazon, I appreciate his help.”

“I’ll not be left behind, wizard!” Sarantos was adamant about being included in this journey and not feeling like a tag-along.

The wizard laughed. “Of course, you’ll be joining us Sarantos, after our last adventure I’d be a fool to leave you behind.”

“What about me?”

The dwarf’s gruff voice made everyone at the table laugh.

“Okay, calm down everyone. There’ll only be a few of us going with our guide Gabby - Murielle, Sergio, Halo, Sarantos, Switch, Blayke and myself. There’s no need for extra hands in this situation, it could be more disastrous than helpful. I believe those that were mentioned will be sufficient to handle anything that comes up, good or evil. I’m quite confident in the group that I’ve chosen. Believe me, it was given a lot of thought.”



Halo addressed the group gathered at the breakfast table. “I’ll be going as a young woman this time. Her name is Willow Elm and she offers the skills of the Druid, a caregiver of earth and creatures of the earth.”

After speaking, her appearance began to fade in and out and a fog engulfed the small old woman they knew as Halo. Sarantos rubbed his eyes and looked again. Where Halo had been was now an incredibly beautiful woman with gold eyes and brown hair with green and golden flecks through it. Her face was clean

and fresh with a small nose and large kissable lips that held a tint of sparkle. She appeared to be around twenty five with clothes that matched her hair color. Her button down shirt was open at the top and quite revealing, but the object that caught Sarantos attention was the large medallion that fell between her voluptuous breasts. The sun was peering through a forest that glowed with the fresh morning spirit and caused the medallion to illuminate a crisp light. He shook his head to break the spell. She stood up and spun around showing off her youthful figure and

very tight brown leather pants that were cut off just above the ankle. She had an ankle bracer on her left leg that had script writing of an old magic Sarantos didn't recognize. However, he immediately sensed it was magical.

Blayke turned red and lowered his head. Sarantos knew his friend was in love with this beautiful woman of an ancient race but wasn't sure if a relationship would ever work out between the two of them.

He felt a twinge of sadness for Blayke.

Gabby jumped up and grabbed her cloak. "I'll be off wizard. Please be ready upon my return. I'll be back when the moon begins to wane. We'll leave promptly at dusk."

Then she walked out the door leaving everyone at the table in deep thought.

Brad patted him on the back. "Sarantos, I'll be gone for a few days. I'll be in Telling with Brazon if you need me."

The room cleared quite quickly and Sarantos sat at the table with Wallis. He watched Mika naively snoring comfortably by the fire. He felt at peace in this house and remembered when they'd first come here, so long ago.

The wizard looked up and smiled. "Sarantos, this is your home now and I'm honored to have you both as a friend and ally. I don't know what we'll encounter on this trip. Dangerous spells and alien creatures forged by magic, I assume, along with plants we've never experienced before that might prove deadly. I can't tell you how to prepare, but maybe the best advice would be to work on music to protect the group with songs that reinforce our health before combat."

Wallis looked off into the distance and his eyes twinkled.

"Will Mika join us?"



“Yes. She’s part of me. You know I love having her around whenever possible!” He puffed on his pipe and pulled at his beard. “Sometimes my friend, the best adventures for the most worthy causes can be the most challenging...and that’s what makes them so worthy.”

Mika rolled over and purred as the flames from the fire rose and flickered taking the chill off of the room. The excitement was palpable.