

The

Wishing

Well

The Paradan Tales

Book 1

A Novel by Holly Zitting

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This book is dedicated to my parents.

Sandy and Allen and Brian and Bernice.

*Thank you for always supporting me and
loving me when I was my most, unlovable.*

*Also, for my brothers and sisters both by
blood and by love. My life is enriched each
day by having you in it.*

*And for anyone who is searching for their
happily ever after.....*

The Wishing Well

Prologue

I have always believed every wish each held a great deal of power.

As a little girl I used to wait up at night then I would look out my window in search of the first evening star. Then, with all the faith and hope in me, I would make my wish. Holding tight onto the golden coin in my hand it grew heavier and heavier in my cold and sweaty palm. My wish joined with it. I would drop it deep into the dark abyss of the wishing well, knowing it would change the direction of my destiny. My forever.

I looked up into the icy eyes which spoke deep into my heart.

I longed for him to stop me. There was a growing circle of mythical creatures starting to surround me. I had come to love them as my family. I couldn't believe I was about to leave them all. I willed the solid gold coin in my hand to disappear into thin air, and then I would never have to make this

impossible wish. Stepping closer to the well and looking down at the seemingly endless hole in the earth— I braced myself.

Closing my eyes, I held the coin close to my lips and whispered quietly to myself “I wish— to go home.”

The coin dropped quickly out of my hand and into the chilling darkness. It burned my fingers as it left them. Afraid this was going to be the last moment I saw them I looked into the eyes of the boy I loved. Focusing on him, trying to remember every inch of the love I would soon lose. It has been said “Be careful what you wish for, it just might come true.” As much as I knew how true those words were, it would never stop me from wishing.

Chapter 1

The Wishing Well

I could hear them following me.

All I could think was not here, *not now*. I dealt with my growing gang of tormentors enough at school. Now they were following me to my sanctuary. Tears threatened to spill over my anxious eyes. There weren't many places I could hide anymore. The last time I encountered them on my own, I had ended up with bruises and a large cut to my arm. A fading scar on my left arm was a constant reminder of that day. My parents had done all they could to protect me. The principal had even called in the police on more than one occasion. This only fed their hatred. No one could ever give me a reason why they were constantly after me. My parents thought they were jealous. My denials only prompted my parents into telling me how I never saw myself the way they did.

I would never understand.

By worldly standards I was considered a beauty.

My hair was almost to my waist. It was chestnut brown with auburn highlights. I had finally grown out of my baby fat stage, as my mom liked to call it. Thankfully I no longer had to listen to her solicit constant helpful tips on how to lose those extra few unwanted pounds. She always wanted me to try some crazy diet with her. I had grown almost 8 inches in the past year. I was five foot seven and still growing. My body was long and lean thanks to my new addiction to running. My eyes are the color of the Caribbean ocean on a sunny day.

Looking in the mirror, they were my favorite part of my reflection.

I had always been active in student government. However, lately one of my favorite things at school was working with the kids with special needs. There was a special program where they taught life skills to kids. I was the student who was in charge. It was there where I spent the bulk of my after school time. Being around those without a voice . . . I could relate to how they felt, like right now. My voice was caught behind the lump in my throat. I was rushing and my lungs were starting to rebel.

The top of the clearing was quickly approaching.

It was a pretty barren hill. Rounding at the top and then heading back down there wasn't much to see with the exception of a large wishing well. It sat right smack dab in the middle of the hill; you could see 360 degrees from it. I had sent many wishes down into the ebony abyss hoping they would someday come true. The only wish I needed answered right now was for me to disappear.

I searched for a hiding spot.

Even though I had been to the top of this hill a hundred times I prayed something new would magically materialize. Luck didn't seem to be on my side today. One reason I loved this hill is because it sat high up. You could see the whole valley from up here. I could spend hours sitting up against the wishing well. Either I would read or just daydream.

The well itself had seen better days.

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It had been here longer than the town. It had been built out of broken gray mortar bricks. Early settlers had built it to christen and bless the land. They had been extremely superstitious, so they built it before harvesting a single tree. Dis-use and no one taking the time to repair the damage over the years had started to show. Grass grew between the cracks; moss was starting to cover most of the bricks. Once out of curiosity I had tried to use the hand crank to see if it still worked.

It was frozen in place but I could see the bucket was still intact not far from the rim.

It was larger than a normal bucket and square in shape. The sounds of their rough shuffling footsteps were getting louder. I could hear them gasping for breath. This trip up the hill was easy for me. I did it often, sometimes more than once a day. I could walk it in my sleep. Without taking a second to think about it, I climbed up and over into the wishing well. My legs worked their way into the large bucket and I held on for dear life.

Every inch of me was quivering. I had to hold my mouth shut to soften the sounds of my teeth rocking together. *Could they hear the pounding of my heart?*

“Where did she go?” An angry, venom filled voice barked.

“You said she came up this hill__” a male voice shook with contention.

“Are you joking? I’m going home. This is ridiculous__ Come on, Taos,” a whiny voice cried.

Murmuring and complaints along with swearing echoed down the hillside. My legs were scraped and bloody. Forced into the small space my muscles were so tense they complained under the strain.

How long was long enough?

Did I dare move?

Would I be safe if I left my haven? My heart still thudded like it was trying to keep pace with a jack-hammer. My lungs burned. It was then I realized that I had stopped breathing. Slowly exhaling I tried to be as quiet as possible.

Time passed.

My breathing and heartbeat slowed. It was getting dark and I realized just how long I had been in the tight space. It had been long enough for them to make their way down the mountain so I gripped the edges of the bucket and proceeded to push myself up. With one hand I reached for the edge of the wishing well. The stone crumbled and I started to slip. Panic sets in.

Shuffling my hands to try to regain my balance, the bucket creaked and groaned in protest. I could feel it weakening. My only thought was please, *no*__

Then. . . . I fell.

Chapter 2

I wanted to scream.

The sound was stuck in the back of my throat. It was fighting to escape. My brain disconnected from my voice box, while the connections to my hands weren't working any better. With every breath my already ravaged and bleeding fingers were desperate to find a hold along the ragged rocks.

I prepared myself to hit the bottom.

Everyone says your life flashes through your mind when you're preparing to die. Maybe it is a reminder of all the good and bad moments in your life. That wasn't happening. Instead I saw what I wanted to do with my future. Every little girl wants to find her prince charming and fall in love. I saw

myself walking down an aisle with a man who I didn't know yet, but dreamt of often. Another image taunting me was of myself with a lap full of children.

My children.

I wanted to be a mom someday. More than I wanted to be anything else, *I wanted to be a mom.*

Reality hit me I was still falling. This shouldn't be possible. My body should be broken in a hundred pieces by now. The air around me was no longer heated. It was turning cooler and icy.

I shivered.

Wrapping my arms around myself trying to comfort and warm at the same time. Finally after what felt like an eternity the bottom seemed to be approaching. Light_ It was dim, but I could just make out the subtle shift in the well. What had been round and long was now turning into something narrow and cone shaped.

I was running out of space.

Terror overtook me and I blacked out.

Chapter 3

The Wishing Well

I woke up to what had to be a dream.

There was someone or something standing over me. I was guessing it was male, and he looked more scared of me than I was of him. The only way I could properly describe him was *hideous*. He was covered in black hair or fur. I wasn't sure. Something made my stomach heave—his face. A flattened pushed up nose reminded me of a wild boar. Each of his eyes were large and misshapen. They looked cold and dark staring down at me while he—*sarled at me*. Long pointed snagged teeth jettied out of his oversized mouth. His ears were half the size of his head and came to large points at the top.

Burlap seemed to be the fabric of his choice with the exception of a metal vest. It looked like he had made it himself. It had been put together from random pieces of leftover scraps. I wondered if it was decorative or if he used it as armor? *He seemed to be terrified*. There was fear dancing in his eyes. *What could he have to fear?*

"Why are you here?" He sneered, freakishly. Looking at me quizzically, my lips were frozen in place. I wasn't even sure where HERE was. Terror still seized my body.

"Fine. I will take you to King Tommit. He will find out what you have been up too."

Did I hear him right? King?

He picked me up with only one hand it was as if I weighed nothing. He smelled like rotting meat. My dad stood at six feet five inches and he was taller than him. My head was spinning and I was on the verge of throwing up. My eyes were closed trying to fight the panic growing in my stomach.

The fear must have won out, because I was once again in the darkness.

I thanked the universe for small favors.

*

He dropped like a hot potato.

My already sore and damaged body groaned in protest. I tried biting my lower lip and not allowing a single sound to escape. Fear and confusion had etched their way into the furrows of my face. Looking around, I would have to guess I was in some sort of throne room. It was massive; you could have fit a football field in the room. White marble walls and floors shined like someone had just polished them. Heavy red curtains hung, on either side of the double windows, they were the length of each wall. There were lots of glaring angry stares directed in my way. Being alone with my tormentors would have been preferable to this.

What were they waiting for?

My heart was pounding. My skin trembled with terror.

Horns sounded.

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Everyone turned to the origin of the sound. The guards marched toward us. They were surrounding someone. It was hard to see who it was, because of their uniform caps towered over them. Each of the guards were dressed in rich gold's and reds. Crimson red pants which ended with shiny lace up black boots. Their shirts were the same red on their back and arms. The fronts of their shirts were gold and were accented by two rows of golden buttons.

Each one wore a hat reminding me of the guards at Buckingham Palace, except they were gold and metal. In each of their hands, they held were shiny, sharp steel spears.

They marched in perfect rhythm. Making their way to the over opulent throne. It appeared to be carved from a single piece of gold. Then, someone who had zero restraint bedazzled almost every inch of it.

It was ghastly and beautiful at the same time.

The guards parted and then at once turned around to face me. By the looks on their faces you would think I was the most dangerous creature they had ever come in contact with. After seeing the snarling beast that dragged me here, I wondered how that was even possible. With great trepidation three guards stepped left while the other three stepped right.

Sitting on the throne was the man they had been hiding.

He had wavy dirty blonde hair that hung to the nape of his neck. It had streaks of black underneath threatening to peek out. His eyes were the color of coal; they were starkly contrasted by his translucent milky white skin. I guessed he was somewhere in his late twenty's, but it was hard to tell. He was dressed in all black, black slip on boots, black leggings, which all led to a black silk button up shirt. A dark blood red cape rested on his shoulders. Sitting on top of his head, was a golden crown. Whoever had bejeweled the throne had gotten their hot little hands on the crown, too. It was gaudy at best, but it was all overpowered by his smugness.

"Who, have you brought this time, Cronan?" His question was addressed to my captor.

"I caught it," he raised his awful nose at me, "trying to sneak into Paradan."

Sneak? Paradan?

I forced my mouth to stay shut. My mind was still half convinced I was dreaming. The King considered his words for a brief moment. Anger grew around his eyes, his fists clenched in fury. He jumped out of his seat in a rage.

"You're from Fara_ King Calas sent you here to spy on me didn't he_?" He was standing shaking those furious fists at me. I was more lost than before if that was possible. Shaking my head no in reply, the tears finally started breaking free.

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“And, just what are you wearing_” I looked down at my clothes. I was wearing simple dark blue jeans and a purple shirt.

“I would think that King Calas would at least have a little something in that huge head of his to work with. Take her out of my sight and put her to work with the maids. You will have the rest of your miserable life to see my glory up close.” He laughed and others in the room joined in.

I tried pinching myself willing my eyes to open and for me to be at home in my bed.

When they opened I was surrounded by the over dressed guards. One of them picked me up. I started kicking and fighting back. They just laughed. Another one grabbed my legs with ease dragging me thru the opulent hallways.

Fear had overtaken my body in such a way my nerves felt as if they were on fire. Everywhere they touched me, felt like my skin was blistering. *I wanted to go home. I wanted far, far away from this fairy tale nightmare.*

I couldn't believe how big this place was.

It reminded me of a long forgotten labyrinth. Trying to escape wasn't going to be easy. Looking back in the direction we had come I couldn't even remember our path. We went further into the recesses of the pit of the castle. After ten more minutes they stopped suddenly. My eyes searched for our ending.

The door in front of us looked just like all of the others.

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