



THE LEGEND OF

# MOOD VALLEY

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## Prologue

# TWENTY YEARS AGO

Three figures, all wearing headphones and carrying large metal canisters, approached the clearing. It was getting dark. They stopped and waved nets through the air, similar to the ones you'd use to catch butterflies or beetles or lightning bugs. It wasn't a particularly good night for lightning bugs which was unfortunate. The Mood Mountains were dark that time of year and they could have used the extra light for what was about to come next. They shook the empty nets into the canisters and shut the lids tightly.

The tallest of the group took off his headphones and motioned for the other two to do the same. One by one they did so and rested their equipment on the grass, careful not to disturb their haul. Sitting down after the long day, it felt good to relax on the soft, velvety moss with the smell of pine needles filling the air.

“We can take off our gear while we eat but if you start to feel sad put it back on right away,” said the leader, pulling out three sandwiches from his knapsack.

“We don’t want to take any chances.”

“Think we caught anything?” asked one of the others.

“I think this may be our best catch yet,” said the leader in between bites. He nodded towards his headphones. “My mood has been changing even with the neutralizers.”

“I can’t listen to it anymore,” the other one said.. “I wish we brought some music.”

“Music wouldn’t cut it,” said the leader.. “Better safe than...”

*CRASH.* The sound of breaking branches filled the air. And then a loud, bellowing sound.

*WAAAAH. WAAAAH. WAAAAAAHHH.*

A dark blue mist spilled onto the forest floor around them, bringing with it a strong skunk-like smell. They were struck with an intense feeling of dread and gloom and an overwhelming sense of sadness. They couldn’t see it, but they could hear it coming for them-- the loud lugubrious growls, the snapping tree trunks like twigs with every step, the sickening sorrowful smell, the blissless blue fog. They knew what it was. There was no doubt in their minds. But they weren’t going to wait and see it.

“Run for your lives!” shouted the leader as he took off into the forest. The others ran fast, but not fast enough, branches whipping their faces as they tried to get away.

They were both out of breath but kept running. Their leader had disappeared and the smaller one was starting to fall behind. He doubted whether he could outrun the thing that was chasing them. He felt doomed and trapped when – *SMACK*. his foot hit a rock and he found himself tumbling head over heels onto the forest floor. Behind him he heard the grim growling getting closer.

*GRRRRRRRRRAARRRR!*

“Help me!” he yelled but now there was no one there to hear him. No person that is. He desperately tried to move but the pain was excruciating. It was hopeless. They had heard the legend but had never believed it. He should have known better. He should never have taken them there. Or maybe this was the plan all along. To get rid of them. The whole day and his whole life had been one big disaster. Why had they agreed to help? Why were they doing this terrible research? The sadness was overwhelming as he waited for it to reach him. He could feel the icy blue mist of misery covering his body as he closed his eyes and drifted off.

## Chapter 1

# THE CONTEST

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, if you would for one moment hold your tears, I have an important announcement. As the Mayor of Forlorn in the State of Misery I am unhappy to present this year's winner of woe, loser of levity, and chief of grief. The Saddest Person In the World Award goes to...Envelope please.....Sadie Downer...for the third year in a row. We're all impressed. Or should I say depressed? Congratulations, Sadie! You make us all very sad to know you!"

The crowd jeered and returned to crying.

"Sadie, do you have anything you'd like to say?" asked Mayor Sadenuf, but he already knew what she would say. Or rather, not say.

Sadie Downer started to cry. She cried and cried and wiped away her tears with a tissue. She wasn't much of a talker because it got in the way of her crying. She was a cryer -- which made sense with her winning the Saddest Person award

and all. And when she cried, other people cried just watching her and they too wiped their tears with tissues. Sadie looked so sad because she was so sad. Everyone was sad in Forlorn -- as they were expected to be -- but Sadie was in a league of her own. All alone.

Because not only were the Forlorners a sad bunch who barely talked to one another, but the city of Forlorn itself was a depressing looking city slowly sinking into the slime of the Mood River. If you've never been there, and I wouldn't suggest you visit, it is surrounded on the East by the Wall of Sadness and on the West by the Foul Feelings Forest (in the Mood Mountains). The buildings were dull and gray and the Forlorners were packed in like sardines - or as they called them sad-ines. There were few plants or trees except for an occasional weeping willow.

But on the other side of the Mood River, almost unbeknownst to the Forlorners, was the bright, light Municipality of Joviality -- which as you might imagine was more popular with tourists. The Forlorners knew about Joviality but they had never seen it before due to the aforementioned Wall of Sadness which blocked their view as it was meant to do. If they had been able to see it, they would have seen that Joviality was bordered by the Mood River with its beautiful sunny beaches, filled with crowds but never too crowded. Houses were painted blue and peach and lemon yellow and they were all surrounded by green gardens. There

were cherry trees in the spring and orange trees in the summer and further to the East in the distance were fields of flowers, popular spots for happy campers, where the Mood Mountains curved towards the sea. It was a valley after all. The Mood River flowed through the valley separating these two opposing cities while it churned and turned into the Emotion Ocean. But in case you were wondering, where you were born and where you lived was not up to you. No. That was a matter of fate or at least it had always been. Until now.

Where were we? Ah yes. In Forlorn with Sadie crying about winning the contest. Now Forlorn Mayor Sadenuf took the microphone again. "As the winner of the Saddest Person in the world Award, I present to you a one month supply of Sadenuf Tissues. I know, I know, it used to be a year. We are also giving you the latest version of the Pity-o-game created right here, Forlnight, and last but not least your very own Cryphone! Congratulations, Sadie! We can all learn from you!" He turned and handed her the Saddest Person trophy.

"You have shown us that you've got the power to turn on your sadness like a summer rainstorm!" Sadenuf said to the crowd and then he shouted out, "She's got the power! And as for the rest of you losers, you can cry again next year!"

Making her way through the crowd, Sadie's mom, Dolorous, came over and gave Sadie a hug. "I'm so proud of you, Sadie! You've done it again!"

But Sadie just looked up at her mom and began crying even more.

"What is it, Sadie? Why are you crying? The contest is over."

Sadie looked down and just shook her head and kept crying.

"What are you so sad about?" Dolorous asked.

"I... I don't...I don't know," Sadie whispered.

"Well, It must be something," Dolorous said. "Sadie, speak up!"

"Now everyone's gonna hate me, even more" Sadie whispered to her mom.

"I'm tired of being the Saddest Person in the World."

"Shhh!" Dolorous said. "If you don't want to be, then you don't have to be."

"But, mom, I can't help it," Sadie said.

"We'll see about that," Dolorous said. "Maybe your mood is more up to you than you know. Like Sadenuf said, you've got the power."

"Sadie, come join us!" shouted Sobina the head of the Forlorn Tearleaders.

"We're up!" Much to her dismay, Sadie was a member of the Tearleaders and the Tearleaders had to perform at all Forlorn events. Sobina handed her some tear drop shaped pompoms and Sadie joined the formation.

"Cry, Cry, Cry, Let me see your tears. Cry, Cry, Cry, year after year!"

shouted the Forlorn Tearleaders, led by Sobina, as they waved their teardrops in the air. "Go Forlorn! Go Forlorn! Go Forlorn! Go sadness! Go sadness! No More Happiness. Go Sadness. Go sadness. Goooooo sadness!"



Following the Tearleaders, came the Forlorn Frown Force with their dol-drumline led by none other than the dreaded Dark Thinker, also known as the Town Cryer. Dark Thinker was the scariest person in Forlorn and always wore a dark cape and a mask covered with scaly looking crystal tears. He spoke in a robotic voice and his only job was to make the Forlorners as sad as possible. As they marched in unison, shoulder to shoulder, the Frown Force repeated over and over, "Every day we must feel sad. Sad is good and happy's bad!" When they reached the center of the town square, they stopped, spread out, and formed the shape of a frown face as they always did. Unfortunately the frown face formation was winking in a rather amusing way. It was missing one eye because one of the newer members of the Frown Force was missing. "Where's the eye?" shouted Dark Thinker. "He's late again!" said Fred, the Frown Force Enforcer. A second later, in came running the boy at the eye of the frown. This was Wally Downer, Sadie's younger brother who seemed to always be up to something.

He was still struggling to get into his uniform and as he bent down to tie his shoelaces he let out a huge fart.

*PPPPPPBBBBBBTTTTT!!* was picked up by the microphone so everyone could hear it. As he did, the very serious crowd started smiling and a few snickers broke through the silence.

“Stop that!” shouted Sadenuf, “I will have you all thrown in jail for laughing”

(Dear Serious reader, we apologize for this fart joke but wanted to include just one fart joke for the less serious readers. We will try not to include another fart joke in the story unless the plot requires it.)

As soon as they were done, Wally came running over to Sadie who was still standing with their mom. Wally was crying and started to wipe away a tear with the back of his hand. "Wally, stop! What are you doing," whispered Sadie. "You know it's against the law to not use a tissue." She handed him a tissue. "I mean first the farting and now this. I told you not to eat so much fiber."

"When? When? When is it going to be my turn? Why does she always have to win?"

"Wally," Dolorous said. "You're good at other things."

"But I never get a prize," Wally cried.

"Oh, you want to be the saddest now?" asked Sadie. "Okay." And then just like that, she turned and handed Wally the Saddest Person trophy she had just won. "Here. It's yours!"

For a second Wally stopped crying and looked at the trophy in his arms. He was stunned. Had Sadie really just given it to him? It had happened so fast. So fast, that no one might have noticed.

Except that someone did notice. And they were not going to let Sadie's sadness just slip away.