

## Chapter 5

### “I’d Give Anything”

Sarantos knew he would give anything for his heart to be happy, but there was a chill in the air tonight that caused his heart to shatter, and unfortunately he didn’t feel it could be repaired. The voice of the woman he loved started to fade and her request for him to rescue her went unanswered. The depth of his ache was unbearable.

A horrific scream born from despair rang heavy in his ears threatening to explode his head. He couldn’t handle the impact it had on his spirit, as his hands covered his ears in a feeble attempt to stop such sadness. It failed of course.

When he thought he couldn’t endure the tortuous noise any longer someone began shaking him and slowly the unbearable screaming subsided.



“Sarantos? Oh, no . . . stop, please stop. The screaming won’t bring her back.” The voice belonged to Brad. He lifted Sarantos to stand next to him and wrapped his arms around him in an attempt to comfort his best friend. “Are you okay? I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry,” Brad whispered so low it seemed as though he was talking to himself.

Sarantos managed to lift his head and looked into the face of his long time friend and watched as tears slowly welled up in the corners of his eyes. Brad’s voice quivered, “I’m sorry Sarantos. We’ll find Leigh, even if it takes our entire lifetime. She is not lost my friend if we don’t give up believing we’ll find her.”

A strong hand came down on the left shoulder of Sarantos. The wizard’s voice rose in determination and volume, “They acquired exactly what they came for,

Sarantos. You have to be strong, for Leigh and for all of us. We won't stop searching until we find her and she is once again safe among us, her friends."

Sarantos nodded his head in agreement, because to speak was futile.

The wizard continued, "I'm sorry that I had to put a spell around you . . ."

Sarantos turned and quickly grabbed the wizard by the robes that hung loosely around his neck. This was now stopping the wizard from speaking as his body was pulled to stand face to face with Sarantos.

Their eyes locked and Sarantos venomously spat his words, "What are you saying, cruel wizard? You prevented me from saving the woman I love?" Sarantos stood there shaking and seething in anger.

The wizard's eyes were deep pools of sadness and held the understanding of one who had also lost loved ones, "Yes, Sarantos. I stopped you from dying on this day. The she-vampire would've easily taken you for her own and Leigh and you would've watched each other drained slowly until you both begged to die. You would have been tortured beyond comprehension while constantly denied the arrival of death. Even though time would become irrelevant, each second accounted for would belong to another day of death evading you. The specter of death that came for you would knock on your conscience every single moment, and its closeness you would beg to taste, but you would never be allowed to partake in the pleasure of dining on death. I couldn't let that happen, even if it meant the end of our friendship. Remember this, Sarantos, I loved her, too."

Mika stood next to the wizard, but only watched the confrontation in silence. Sarantos feared if she had to choose, the odds would have been greatly in favor of the wizard. He relaxed his grip on Wallis and dropped his eyes to stare at the earth beneath his feet. He'd never felt so damn exhausted in his life.

"I apologize for my reaction to you, Wallis. You only did what needed to be done. I know that in my heart. Clearly, I was lost in my own desperate desire to save Leigh and all common sense disappeared. Our friendship isn't jeopardized." Sarantos's pain was evident as he lifted his eyes and stared into the soul of the wizard, "I love her, Wallis, and I want you to know this. I'd give up everything and anything in this world, including the one I left, for my heart to be happy with Leigh, again."

*“I know.”*

The others had stood there helplessly watching the confrontation between Sarantos and the wizard. He looked at their faces and saw genuine concern and understanding, but he held his emotions in check. Muriele moved to Brad’s side and put her arms around him, as he cried openly. Sarantos found it odd that something else caught his attention instead of his friend’s sadness.

Out of the heavy woodland area that surrounded them voices spoke to the coolness of the weary night. A variety of owls acknowledged him to listen very closely. Their sound was enchanting and melancholy with an operatic song that vibrated in his chest with an unearthly sadness. It was Leigh, left to speak without a voice he thought. She had to borrow one from the world to remind him how he’d failed.

He spoke to the owls, “Give her a message. I was all for you and you were all about me. I will come find you my love and once again, it will be true. This I swear to you.”

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Wallis, Brad and Sarantos sat at a huge oak table in front of a comforting and blazing fire. The table was hand carved with small acorns embedded along the top and they eagerly covered the outside edge of the rectangle. The four legs were oaken tree stumps of younger trees that were found already fallen by storms or early death. A large diversity of plants with intricate leaves were carved into the legs and table top as a decoration. It was a meaningful and artistic masterpiece.

The three of them sat there drinking a very heady sage tea with a spoon of honey infused with a hint of lavender. They spoke softly while the others were getting a much deserved rest. The three friends couldn't let the happenings of the evening go without working on some sort of plan.

"I'm not sure why they took Leigh," the wizard shook his head in confusion, paused and spoke again, "She kept things from me. I fear she had been in danger for a while, but had she shared her concerns with me . . . well, I wouldn't have let her continue. She risked her life for information and in the end forced the leader out into the open. We have that now for sure, although it's not a lot to go on at the moment."

Brad lowered his head, as though honoring her bravery.

Sarantos quietly said, "She was afraid tonight. I've never known Leigh to be afraid."

The wizard poured more tea, "We need to-"

He was interrupted by a slight tapping on the cabin door.

They all glanced at each other before Brad jumped up to answer it, and as he opened the door a chill came into the room along with an incredibly handsome man. Sarantos thought he looked like one of those guys on a romance novel he used to see at the drugstore by the magazines.

His wavy and dark shoulder length hair was pulled back and tied in a ponytail, which showed off a slight point at the end of his ears and a finely chiseled face, that was almost godlike. His bright blue eyes were the color of cornflowers and they illuminated the images of the dancing fire inside them. Sarantos felt the presence of a supremely confident and elegant man who held himself in high regard and he had no doubt others did, as well. His charm was fairly obvious.

He didn't wait to be invited inside to join them. The mysterious man casually walked to the table and sat down across from Wallis. He smiled at the wizard and poured himself a cup of tea. Brad shut the door.

Mika flicked her tail, but never moved from her position in front of the fire. The wizard cursed and stood up. His hands started going through quick and jerky motions while the words he was chanting Sarantos knew belonged to a magical

spell. Brad and Sarantos became quickly alarmed and started to react by moving toward their weapons.

The man sat there calmly drinking his tea, but held up his right hand and in a disturbingly seductive voice said, “Sit down wizard. We have much to discuss and dawn quickly approaches along with the limited time I have to spend in this meeting.”

The wizard suddenly went silent. Sarantos couldn’t be sure if the strange guest had caused his silence by casting a spell at him or Wallis chose to end his own incantation.

“My name is...”

The wizard cut him off, “I know your name Sergio and I know what you are. What I don’t understand is why you could do such a thing and become part of this nightmare that will surely end in your destruction.”

Sergio blinked and half smiled in amusement, “I rather thought your friends might want to know who I am. Well, wizard, have it your way. I was never fond of introductions, anyway. They tend to bore me.” He turned toward Brad, “Since you’re standing there with nothing to do, could I have some food? I’m rather famished.”



Brad looked a little annoyed, but quickly placed a loaf of bread, sliced apples, and cheese on the table. The conversation had ended until this task was completed and the wizard finally sat back down in his chair.

Sergio nodded, “Thanks. I appreciate the food.”

He sliced a piece of bread, but before he could enjoy the taste the wizard lost his patience, “What’s this about Sergio. Get to the reason

for your visit so you may leave rapidly.”

Sergio frowned and looked at the wizard, “Come now, Wallis! We’ve been friends for centuries, and you thinking I would have anything to do with this insult to the vampires is hurtful. You must listen to me if you’ve any hope of saving Leigh.”

Sarantos jumped up at the mention of her name and grabbed a bread knife holding it at Sergio’s throat, “Where is she?”

Sergio never moved, but stared into Sarantos’s eyes until he dropped the blade and sat back down, “Let’s not be rash. I’m here to help, if I can take a bite of food and continue without any more interruptions. I’ve already explained my time is limited.”

Brad grabbed the knife and came to his friend’s rescue. He placed it against the back of Sergio’s neck making sure he had no eye contact. He spat, “You will die for that and for all your crimes against humanity, vampire.”

The wizard walked over to Brad and removed the knife from his clinched nervous fingers and handed it to Sergio, “Speak then, Sergio.”

Sarantos watched him closely, because he disliked being manipulated by anyone, much less a vampire.

“Wizard, I’ll start from the beginning. About two years ago a woman came into our circle of vampires. Immediately, she proved herself not trustworthy among our group. We then began noticing how policies and procedures were gradually changing without any votes by the council. We started sending out friends to gather information on her. When suddenly, our old leader, Chaney played his trump card and took her in as his mistress. If you remember him, you’ll understand that was completely out of character!” Wallis nodded and Sergio continued, “He’d been around for too many centuries and possibly grew tired of it all. He became jaded and uncaring. He quit listening to those that were the closest to him. Then, three of his dearest companions disappeared. This situation made us re-evaluate our current position and we will no longer allow a leader to continue longer than two decades. That is if we can ever get back in charge. Well, it was easy for the sorceress to use those persuasive female powers of hers to win her way into Chaney’s confidence. She gradually drained him and began making decisions for him, while he lies in his bed barely alive or so that’s what we’ve learned. We don’t know if he’s even still around or not. We haven’t seen him for the past year.

Surely, you sensed the unusual happenings in our realm, which must have been about the time Leigh entered our domain. We knew who she was and where she came from, my friend.”

Wallis shifted in his seat and replied, “We thought you might know her. Yes, we all watched the vampire’s kingdom slowly come down around them, and after a year we decided something needed to be done. Leigh volunteered to go inside to find out what was going on. She heard of the new leader, though never knew anything about them. We were all very surprised it was a woman. What does she want with Leigh?”

“When Leigh joined our group, she enchanted us and we enjoyed her company. She’d earned a lot of respect in our circle. However, over time our new supposed leader became concerned about Leigh’s influence in our neighborhood. She’s afraid of her and started paying close attention to Leigh once one of her renegades overheard a conversation a couple of the council members were having over initiating Leigh as the new leader. Oh, don’t look concerned Sarantos, the sorceress will not kill her right away. She and her two male vampires will use her for their own pleasure keeping her drained and weak. I know what Leigh is and her telepathic abilities will be severely stifled by the weakness.”

Sarantos inhaled deeply through his nose creating a hiss that gradually escaped from his clenched teeth.

Sergio looked at Sarantos and continued, “I know where she resides, however it’s very well protected. I’ve never been inside. None of our group has had the (cough) privilege to be shown her extravagant and life sucking lairs. She only trusts her renegades to attend to her behind closed doors.”

Sergio smiled a charming smile at each of them and sliced a piece of apple and put it together with some sharp cheddar cheese, then placed it all on top of a piece of bread. He sat there playfully eating and gently nodded his head in approval. Brad shrugged at Sarantos while Wallis took a bite of an apple and waited in silence.

The vampire then requested some ale to wash it down with. Brad complied and decided to pour everyone a mug full of Brazon’s finest ale. Sarantos thought it was indeed a great idea as he drank his down quite quickly and requested a refill.

After a few minutes Sergio began speaking in a voice filled with anger, “This female sorceress brought with her a large following of renegade vampires that



promptly became busy creating an undead army. These undead creatures stand ready to serve her at her bidding. She rewards them heavily. Wild parties in her chambers with enough victims to gorge themselves on for weeks, and sometimes they do just that.” His face took on a look of disgust, as he paused to take a sip of ale. “It gives noble vampires a bad name. Most of us find it indignant and unlawful. We’ve come a long way from our animalistic blood

lust days. Those that we enjoy are willing individuals who take pleasure in being our companions and we take care not to harm them. We worry that her very actions may cause the demise of all vampires. I was elected by our own private counsel to come here and assist you in any way I can.”

“Where did she come from,” asked Sarantos?

“We’re not sure. Maybe if we found that out we might be able to bring her and her minions down. She has powers we’ve never seen before, but she is definitely a magic user and that’s especially dangerous for a vampire. It allows for too many powerful options at her disposal.”

Wallis raised his eyebrows and painfully grimaced, “What types of powers has she used and have you witnessed any of them?”

The sun crept over the treetops and allowed some golden hues to gently dance across the wooden table. Sergio looked toward the window and made an animalistic sound through his pursed lips. He reached into a small sack at his hip and produced a small green vial. Sergio drank it quickly and carefully put the vial back inside the bag. He relaxed and poured himself more ale, as his eyebrows raised in question looking to everyone else at the table, only the wizard had a refill.

Sarantos understood what the vial had meant to Sergio, he'd seen Leigh use it on several occasions, to protect her from the sun.

Sergio sat back and grinned at the wizard, "One thing we haven't seen, but heard of, was how she created her own undead beings. What she used is beyond us and makes the rest of the vampires uneasy. I've witnessed her controlling the weather and even manipulating solid mass. About a month ago, several of our friends challenged her authority and insisted on seeing Chaney. She placed them inside rock outcrops and left only enough of their bodies exposed for them to slowly die of thirst or hunger. She's brutally malicious and certainly must be demonic!"

The wizard guzzled down his ale, stood up and started pacing around the small room. His fingers tugged and pulled on pieces of his long beard twisting them into knotted strands. Then he proceeded to work them gradually out before starting all over again. His actions caused the great cat to raise her head as her ears came forward to listen to Wallis's thoughts. She was obviously tired and calmly returned to her nap when she discovered there was no reason for alarm at this moment.

Sergio studied the wizard for a few moments before he continued, "I come to you now while they are enjoying their victory celebration. I'm sure they're sated within their own egos. We'll continue to get information for you, but we beg of you Wallis to find out who she is and help us remove her from her strong position. The only way, may be by her death, and that suits the council. Her destruction is what we seek. Our hands are tied, wizard, as she watches us closely and also has many spies among our kind."

Wallis stopped pacing and looked directly into Sergio's penetrating eyes, "I've known you a long time and your honesty and gentlemanly conduct has always kept our friendship intact. What happened to you so long ago wasn't your fault, nor did you request to become what you are now, but I was leery and afraid that you'd finally passed over to the darker side of your nature and that all of your kind had moved past reason or logic. I'm glad, my friend, that this wizard has finally made a mistake in his long life." The wizard winked and his eyes held merriment over his last comment.

Sergio smiled, "Thank you, my friend, and I know how it must have appeared to those outside of our intimate circle. Most of us knew Leigh was with you and seeking information on our new leader, but we intentionally kept her in the dark to protect her from serious harm. There was nothing she could do because we didn't have enough knowledge to send back to you."

Sarantos had been listening, but decided to comment, “I think the female leader’s overzealous ego may be used to our advantage. Throughout the history of my earthly world leaders, they were usually driven by a desire for conquest, power, ultimate control and self-motivated ways. In that world, gluttony always turned to paranoia right before their downfall. The illusion of their own greatness didn’t manifest according to their desires, because those desires didn’t necessarily belong to the real world. The sorcerer is already paranoid about Leigh, we just need to push the matter further.”

“Very clever, my friend. It makes sense and it appears you have learned the ways of your world quite well, or you’ve experienced too many powerful men wanting control in your world,” Sergio said while his eyes twinkled with amusement. He leaned over and patted Sarantos on the back and cheerfully commented, “Well done. I appreciate men who think and men who fight for the woman they love. We will be great friends, Sarantos. Another day, I would love to hear more about your world and your home.”



Wallis seemed distracted with his own thoughts but blurted rather forcefully, “What’s her name? Sergio, do you know her real name?”

Brad and Sarantos jumped slightly backwards from the sound of the wizard’s voice. It reminded Sarantos of being in school daydreaming and then the teacher suddenly called his name and jarred him back to the reality of the classroom.

Sergio never flinched a muscle from the wizard’s loud and demanding voice, but quietly responded, “Villmah Beck, that’s her name and we don’t like to use it often, because we’re not sure how far away her ears stretch. I explained earlier that we had many friends

who've done us dangerous favors. They had traveled this world many times searching for answers to her origin and have always come up empty handed."

Mika now joined the wizard in pacing about the tense room. Wallis was used to his chair at home where he could sit by the fire in comfort and think for hours. Sarantos found it very comfortable here, but it wasn't the wizard's home and that could unquestionably make a difference in the way a person feels and thinks.

Home made him think of Leigh and he couldn't stand still knowing she was in such a helpless state. He pulled up an image of them together and sent her a message - 'I miss you so much, I miss us so much.' Sarantos knew that this constant mantra of sending Leigh mental thoughts would keep him alive and not wallowing in despair and grief. She would hear him. She must he thought, because hope was all he had left of her.

Without another word, Sergio finished his ale and headed for the door. The wizard followed him and gave him the warm embrace of friends departing.

"Again, my heart is glad that you've kept your sanity and humanity under such trying circumstances."

Sergio grinned from ear to ear and held out his hand to shake the hand of the wizard, "Be safe, you old scoundrel."

Muriele entered the room and looked beautifully refreshed. She was smiling until she noticed Sergio and stood transfixed on his presence, here in this place and standing in front of her.

Sergio moved with the grace of royalty and was quickly by her side. He gently placed his arms around the small of her back and pulled her to him. Their eyes were locked in an intensely passionate embrace. It appeared to them no one else was present as they drank from the depths of each other's souls. It was personal and erotic.

Sarantos looked at Brad and saw his face was red with jealousy and anger, but he quickly returned his gaze to the two elves. He felt pretty uncomfortable, as though he were watching two people making love with their eyes. It was incredibly and emotionally stimulating but he couldn't break his eyes away from the sheer beauty of it.

Sergio slid his hands from her back to her face as his fingers effortlessly brushed through her hair to either side of her temples and deeply kissed her lips. The kiss was fevered. That was all Brad could handle. As he started to stand up, Sarantos reached his hand over to firmly hold him to his seat. Brad looked angrily at him. Sarantos face held understanding, but he shook his head for Brad to let it go. His friend dropped his head in defeat and nervously relaxed.

Sergio's voice was wistful and choked with emotion, "I miss you, my beautiful diamond."

"And I you, my darling. If we could go back in time, you would never go help our cousins in battle with the gnomes. Instead, you would've stayed in my arms and you would not be forever lost to me. Sometimes it breaks me down and I can't find a reason to go on."

His eyes danced inside hers and he removed a silver ring from his finger and turned her hand over. He placed the ring in her fragile hand and before he folded her fingers over the ring, yellow diamonds sparkled in the firelight sending a mystical light around the subdued room.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek and moved across the room with the dignity and grace of a king. It was so quiet you could only hear the whoosh of his long leather coat that moved around his body with the flamboyant, fluid motion of his unforced movement.

When Sergio arrived at the door, he turned and nodded his head while acknowledging everyone in the room with eyes that permeated each soul in warmth, as his voice empowered all who heard him speak with confidence, "You will succeed, my friends. Until we meet again."

He blew a kiss at Muriele and was gone into the dawning of a new day. Sarantos went to the window to watch him leave, but there was no trace of the elf. He vanished into thin air.

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Sarantos was abruptly awakened by horses and voices outside in the yard. The day appeared to be retreating into dusk. He had slept too long and there was much to be done. The two best friends had shared a small room that had nothing in it but two adjacent beds and one large window with a red painted shutter. Brad was trying to hide under the covers from the sounds that interfered with his dreams, of Muriele.

Sarantos began pulling on his jeans and said to him, “I hope you’re not planning on pouting all day, my friend? That’s not healthy and there is a lot of work to do.”

Brad chose to ignore his comment. Maybe, he was being a little too insensitive to his feelings, but at least Muriele wasn’t in a nest with vampires draining her life.

Sarantos slid his shirt over his head, “Have it your way then, Brad, but I’m hungry and very intent on finding Leigh.”

He turned and left the room, but noticed Brad had thrown back the covers and sat up in his bed.

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Sarantos walked into the dining area where Wallis, Sojan, Derek and Blayke sat eating some stew and chatting. He wondered if Wallis ever slept.

The wizard gestured toward Sarantos, “Come and join us, we have much to discuss.”

He grabbed a bowl of stew and sat down next to Blayke. “What’s going on?”

“I have to leave for a few days and I’ll be taking Mika with me. When I return, it will be with information regarding Villmah’s world and some of us will need to go there to retrieve information on who she is and why she decided to come here, bringing chaos to our realm while spreading dissension among the vampires. I need to ask a favor of you, Sojan.”

Sojan smiled, “Anything for you, my friend.”

“You may not be so willing to grant this wish, because I want your son to come with me, Sarantos, Blayke and Mika to the other world. I don’t know how dangerous it could be though.”

Sojan’s face changed into one of fear, “Why would you need a boy? He is all I have left. I’m afraid I can’t allow it.”

The wizard nodded his head in understanding, but continued, “If I didn’t think he would be useful, I wouldn’t ask you for such a favor, my friend. He has unique skills and I’ve seen other hidden talents as well. He could prove very useful in our journey.”

Before Sojan could speak Derek stood up and proudly announced, “Father, over the past month I’ve had to become a man and deal with grief along with armies of undead creatures. I’ve watched blood being drained until bodies fell over lifeless. I’ve sliced off heads of renegade vampires and shot bats out of the dark skies. It is time for me to decide on my own where I can best serve our comrades in this hour of need. I’ve learned over the years that the wizard is very seldom wrong and his judgment is usually commendable. I will stand with Blayke and Sarantos along the side of the wizard united as friends against the destruction of our world. It is how I choose to live or possibly choose to die. That is my decision, father.”

The wizard smiled and patted him on the back. Sarantos nodded and continued eating. Derek sat back down and looked more like a young prince who just claimed the right to his throne.

Sojan allowed his head to drop to his chest and averted his eyes away from those at the table. No one spoke until Sojan looked up and stood in front of the table. His son pushed back his chair and stood next to him.



Derek's father embraced him as tears slid down his rosy cheeks and his voice crackled slightly, "Well, done, my son. Today you're a man I can be proud of and you honor me and the memory of your mother and sister."

The wizard finished his meal, shoved a loaf of bread in a pouch along with some nuts, then grabbed his staff. "Everyone, while I'm gone, please prepare for my return and be ready to depart immediately upon my arrival. Mika, we must go urgently."

The big cat came from another room and went with the wizard out the door into the cool early evening wind.

"I will see you again, Sarantos," Mika

touched his mind.

Sarantos smiled.

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Brad finally decided to make an appearance and went straight for the stew and filled up a bowl. "Why do we always have stew. I'm sick of eating the same thing over and over. Tomorrow I'm making a nice pizza with herbs and tomatoes from the garden," he whined to no one in particular.

"Pizza would be a nice change, but don't complain to anyone, Brad. The stew is hardy for this world and consists of everything you need to nourish the body. There are no refrigerators, you know and I kind of like it actually."

He was concerned his friend was somewhat losing his sense of humor.

The house soon became active with people from the underground city moving in and out. They brought in wood and piled it in a giant log rack inside the cabin and on the front porch. A jolly woman about fifty years old with deep-set eyes and a

wonderful smile set about cleaning the room with mops and rags. She chatted about the children that played with the animals in the streets underground. She loved watching them and she sang small songs about their games with rhyming lyrics that appealed to Sarantos so much that he joined in for a few verses that danced with simple words. Brad would startle them with a complaint whenever they'd stop singing, so of course they would quickly start the next song. Brazon finally fetched him to assist with gathering herbs and potions that the wizard's group would need on their upcoming journey.

“What upcoming journey,” Brad queried as he followed the alchemist from the room?

He hadn't participated in the conversation when the wizard talked about the trip so he had no clue what Brazon had meant. Sarantos looked at Derek and the woman as all three of them burst out laughing, as she picked up her broom and started another little ditty.

The girl, Arial, came into the house carrying towels for the kitchen and bathing quarters. She grinned and winked at Sarantos and glanced at Derek then left to place the towels in a large linen cabinet in the long hallway.

When she returned to the room, a light-hearted spirit followed her and she took Sarantos by the hand and said, “I think the wizard wants you to prepare for a dangerous mission, but right now, I can assist you all if you but follow me to the underground city. You'll find things that can help you and wonderful people there you should meet.”

Sojan had gone to do chores earlier and Derek had stayed behind listening to the singing, but she didn't acknowledge him, at all. Arial started waltzing across the room with Sarantos, but stopped between the table and doorway. She turned quickly while her skirt whooshed from side to side.



She laughed joyously at the sad and neglected expression of Derek and moved her hand in a flurry of emotion. “Oh, don’t look so forlorn, come along then.”

He smiled and jumped up and moved to the waiting hand of Ariel. She quickly locked his arm in hers and did the same with Sarantos and then led both men to the underground city.

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Arial was a great companion and guided them into many different marvelous shops

where they could barter for potions, food, and just about anything you could possibly imagine. It was very impressive.

Streets or walkways ran between the buildings while children were busy playing tug of war with dogs. Goats, chickens and horses roamed about the green pastures along with a few cats who were more interested in butterflies than resting on the gates of the stock fencing. Crops were growing under Wallis’s magical sunlight. They even had irrigation and openings to the sky that could be closed when they went into hiding.

Everyone Ariel came in contact with, no matter if it was a man, woman or child, they all adored her. She was so talented at touching their hearts. Sarantos became aware of young Derek’s face boasting a smitten look that Ariel was quite aware of and did everything she could to make sure he didn’t lose interest.

She stopped in front of a bakery that had roses growing up an arbor with a stone path under it leading to the door. Ariel giggled and led them quietly inside.

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The smell immediately took Sarantos back to his childhood Christmas days when his grandmother and mother would make loaf after loaf of different exotic breads from all over the world. Some were sesame, French, raisin, and even pumpkin.



The shop was quaint and had an old worldly charm about it that made you want to sit down and stay there forever. They were quickly introduced to Stuart and Elsie who had been married for 10 years and had several young children who were out and about playing in the streets. They both had a wonderful sense of humor that gave the atmosphere an instant explosion of happiness. Brad could've

certainly used this diversion. It might have returned him to his pleasant mannered self.

Arial winked at Elsie and told her to hold out her hand. She placed a well-crafted bracelet in her open palm. The bright colored red and purple gems sparkled with prismatic color off of the golden chain. Elsie proudly held it up and then danced around the room.

She started singing a song about a gift of love and as she twirled around, Arial joined hands with her friend and the two of them danced and sang with voices of a skylark.

Elsie stopped and hugged Arial then she kissed her cheek and exclaimed, “You will have a loaf of my finest raisin bread and a box of papa’s ‘melt in your mouth’ Danish prune pastries.”

Arial clapped, “I’m so pleased you like it. It took a while to craft it, but she’s definitely worth it! I found the gems searching the Angels’ cliffs.”

“Of course, I’m pleased. It’ll make a perfect Moonspass present for Sarah. You have such a gift dearest Ariel!”

Moonspass soon approached and the holiday was celebrated in a manner similar to Christmas. It was a time where parties, fireworks, banquets and decorations occupied the month prior to the day when the two yellow moons would cross the lavender one and switch sides. It took a month for the cycle to end, so each day offered a special significance. The day the moons officially crossed was Moonspass and it was of course celebrated with gifts. It was still two weeks away before the cycle would begin. The preparations were joyful for these people. Sarantos loved this time of year very much.

The bakery door burst open and Brad came running in, “The wizard is already back and requires your presence immediately!”

Sarantos and Derek thanked Ariel and turned to leave the building. Ariel stopped them and handed them her bread and gave each of them two small vials, “Take these with you and if your need is dire, drink only one and it will transport you to Brazon’s home. There’s one for each member of the party. The cat can teleport on her own.”

*They gave her a warm hug for such a great time and left the quaint little shop in quite a hurry.*

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The wizard was pacing and carried his sheathed sword, along with a backpack and his staff. He also had some sort of rod now belted at his hip. Mika had armor on that was golden in color with two bracers on her front legs. Sarantos had never seen her dressed in this fashion, until this moment. Blayke was armored, as well, in an intricate and shiny bluish grey metal, similar to chain mail, but without the hood. He carried both his swords in their sheath. A bow was strapped to his back and a backpack hung right next to it. Sarantos could see the glow of Blayke’s magical drumsticks protruding from a leather pouch that attached to his belt buckle. It had been crafted specifically for them.

“Good. You’re here. We must leave quickly. There’s no time for goodbyes. You will do exactly as I say, now and when we arrive in the other world. We’ve already prepared your backpacks and supplied you with chain mail you’ll absolutely have to wear. There’s no need to worry, though, it was magically made by the blue elves

so it will not encumber you in any way. You can see Blayne moves very easily as he wears it now.”

They both looked toward him. Several men and one woman proceeded to assist the two men in putting on their packs and armor. When they were ready, a woman handed them both three large pouches that attached to their belts. Sarantos could tell they were filled with small items. A tall man handed him his guitar while weapons were passed to Derek.



The three men and Mika stood ready. They watched as the wizard threw a bottle on the floor that crashed and broke open spilling out a heavy mist that smelled like something died. He began an incantation that frightened Sarantos and caused Derek to move closer to his friend. His head pounded from the words when suddenly they were all pulled off their feet and lifted into the air. Sarantos could feel himself being drawn into the mist. It was as though he was being sucked up in a vacuum sweeper. He wanted to scream, but couldn't even breathe. His body was out of control. He was

spinning and falling into an abyss.

His chest was being restricted from wisps of smoke that encircled him when the sound of the wizard's voice rode along the edge of the vapors and his message was clear, "Prepare for battle. We go to the world of Ethel and to the city of Irongate."

His thoughts were fading from consciousness, as he heard Derek screaming for the wizard.