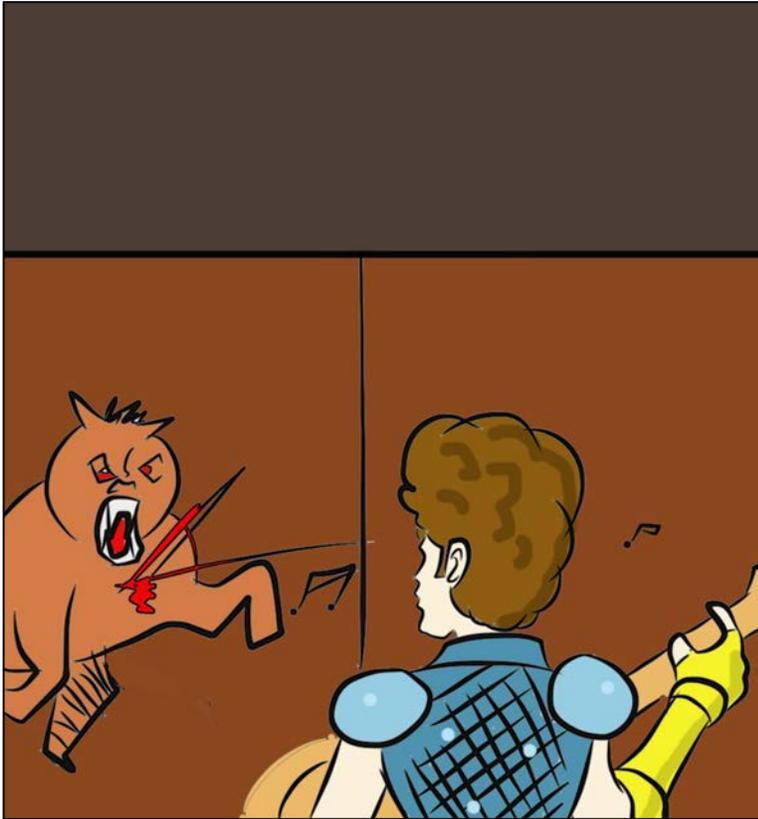


Chapter 10

“Believe”



The crossbow bolt hit its target and caused the first Ogredog to scream out with a bloodcurdling sound that made everyone in the barn want to grab their ears and fall to the ground, but they all stood strong and barely flinched at the painful noise. Sarantos wondered how the children withstood it. Maybe they were used to the land of chaos and the creatures within it?

The song of protection he was surrounding the group with assisted immensely. The intensity of the sounds did not affect them as much as it

would have had he not started the protection spell as soon as the banging on the barn increased. These few moments actually made him feel useful to the group.

Their fury swelled as the body of the dead Ogredog blocked the small hole they'd managed to put in front of the barn door. Amazingly, the animal had never twitched with the bolt sticking out of its eye; the shot that Seymour made was perfect. These creatures wanted inside and their frenzy rose as they worked the barn door creating more and more small holes. Blayke stepped in front of Sarantos.

Sarantos couldn't believe what he saw in front of him. Several Ogredogs were devouring the dead animal in front of them to work their way through and it wasn't at all a pretty site. The sounds and frenzied attacks they made as they dined were atrocious. He couldn't understand how their faces looked at all like the fantasy books he'd seen with pictures of Ogres in it. The name was even the same. It was puzzling! Their body size was similar to that of an Old English Sheep dog, but with sleek black hair that glistened like it was wet. They were fiercer-looking than

your standard pet, boasting bright red eyes and huge fangs. He visualized the movie, "The Fly" where the dog had a man's head. Now that it stood in front of him though, like a scene right out of the movies, it was much more gruesome.

He shook his head, as his song ended. It would protect them for about another half hour.

He felt like throwing up and repeated the questions he'd asked earlier, "What the hell are they? Where did they come from?"

The young Seymour never took his eyes from the beasts, but yelled above the banging, growling and screeching, "They are 'hell' and they're bringing it right to you. They were once Ogre's that were turned into these four-legged beasts, by a wizard. If we live through this, I will share the remarkable story with you."

It's true then; legends are truth. He wondered if someone like himself had traveled to this world at some point in their own life and brought back these stories. Of course, they would've had to have been fictitious. Unless you've actually been to this world, there is no way you'd believe them to be real.

With that thought, several of the other Ogedogs broke the wooden barn into splinters as they raced toward the party. Sarantos wasn't sure how many were behind them, as more heads peered in and they started to growl louder and howl like a wolf, but with a more hideous and unnerving intention.



Derek let loose with his arrows and targeted one repeatedly until it dropped in front of Switch. "Good shooting, there lad," the dwarf yelled as he brought around his axe and took the head off of another one about to take a bite out of him. "They seem to like dwarf meat," Switch snorted! "Good - bring it on!"

Five more drooling beasts started to move slowly into the barn and began to circle the party. After they'd watched their comrades go down so quickly they became

more cautious. They obviously had some form of intelligence or maybe a primal sense of preservation? Quite possibly they were one and the same.

Sarantos started singing a song he thought might make the Ogres more docile. A song he wrote to help relax Mika when she seemed stressed to him, although he thought she just acted that way to hear him play. Either she just enjoyed his music or she gave him a reason to feel more skilled. He really didn't know, but the practice was always great and it also relaxed him just the same.

Blayke was watching the beasts closely, as he shifted around Sarantos to accommodate their movement and protecting him while he sang.

Leigh's beautiful face leaped up in front of him and in this moment, what seemed like his darkest hour, her smile set him free. He sang so perfectly - so peacefully that the beasts moved less aggressively and the thick yellowish drool that saturated their lips and had dripped profusely creating multiple puddles on the dirt floor of the barn somewhat subsided. The Ogres at the newly made openings weren't as obliging to enter the barn so quickly and sniffed the air before they approached.

They howled as their massive and muscular bodies lunged forward toward the defending group. Sarantos thought his life was over and didn't know how Blayke could hold them off, along with the now more timid beasts. Their saliva increased with the anticipation of the men in front of them and their muscles rippled as they leaped into the air with their jaws hanging open ready to sink their fangs into man flesh. The creatures suddenly stopped in mid-air. What in the world?? They were frozen! The four of them fell and shattered into thousands of pieces.

Being very familiar with spell casting at this point in his life, Sarantos wasn't too surprised at the outcome but he was pleasantly surprised at the method.

That's when Blayke and Switch went into action. The swords of Blayke were moving so fast the beasts couldn't follow them. Sarantos kept singing and watched Switch lop off the heads of two of the docile Ogres. Blood was flying everywhere and they were all mercilessly splattered with it. If the creatures weren't so vicious, it would almost be inhumane.

There were more creatures streaming in through larger openings. A few stopped to feast on dead bodies, but the rest were very ready for combat and wanted to play. Blayke danced around in an almost teasing manner before bringing death to any one of his opponents that got too close to him or Sarantos. Seymour and Derek,

were taking them down quite rapidly as they came through the openings. How many were there? It seemed they were never ending. They kept coming in through newly made holes.



Sarantos looked up at the little girl on the loft and noticed her hands were moving and when they stopped she collapsed into the hay. He turned his head quickly back towards the beasts and saw an ice block at least ten feet high that covered the barn door along the bottom from end to end. It was ludicrous. An ice sculpture art form with grotesque faces and teeth of the Ogedogs sticking out at awkward angles. She was amazing that little one.

His voice rose in tribute to little Marty Ellen and her abilities as his music caused the beasts to fall into a more blissful state which then allowed Blayke, Switch, Seymour and Derek to quickly finish them off. They were all working together like a seamless and harmonious symphony.

The barn was littered with horribly smelling bodies as florescent blood dripped from their gaping wounds. Everyone looked around to see if all of their friends were okay.

“I enjoyed myself tremendously,” said Switch with a reserved voice and an innocent twinkle in his eyes.

Seymour was already headed over to grab the ladder. Sarantos joined him. Derek was retrieving any arrows that could still be useable and placed them back in his quiver. Sarantos watched Switch and Blayke as they began to search the barn for any other possible holes or activity of any sort, as he stood at the bottom of the ladder waiting for Seymour to retrieve his sister.

He had a place here. They all did. No one in any of these new worlds he'd ever lived in or visited had a problem knowing their job or understanding that there was always something to do. Children were allowed to express themselves and in turn, grow and mature quickly by doing so. They were responsible because they were given responsibilities. Of course, sometimes they were thrown into adult situations rather unexpectedly, but usually seemed to manage quite well.

The young lad showed his strength as he carried Marty Ellen down from loft. He had worked the land; it increased his stamina and strength. They didn't use fancy equipment like Sarantos's home world, nor did they ruin the planet with pesticides or weed killer. Everything that was ever used was natural. Natural remedies that they made after pulling their own weeds. Sarantos liked that.

"Is she going to be okay?" Sarantos asked Seymour while accompanying him to a straw bed. He watched Seymour as he gently laid his sister down.



"Sure, I'm fine." The girl opened her eyes and artfully peeked at them and with a mischievous grin said, "I just like to make my brother carry me sometimes. It's good for him."

Seymour laughed and tousled her hair, "You're a challenge, that's for sure." He looked at Sarantos, "She really does become extremely tired and has trouble walking for a while sometimes. I'll need to get her some food. Marty Ellen puts a lot of energy into those spells. She's what they

call an Ice Sorcerer, at least when she matures. Right now she's my little sister who has an amazing talent that is very helpful in dire situations. Ice Sorcerers are rare and one never knows when or where they'll be born. She discovered her talent one day, after our parents had died and we were being raided by a small band of renegade Froggers. She handled them quite nicely. Along with me using my crossbow, they didn't last long. Marty saved me. I was about ready to die by the hands of a very aggressive one who charged me with a two-handed sword. I felt fear and death in that one instant before she stopped him. Her anger and fear of losing me prompted her to use the hidden magic inside her." He looked at the cute little girl and smiled with adoring eyes. Her shared expression was the same.

Derek had moved over to join them and he quickly commented, "Great job Marty and Seymour. It was my honor and pleasure to stand beside the two of you in combat."

They both nodded their thanks at him and Sarantos agreed, "I too felt a wonderful camaraderie with the two of you. But, what is a Frogger?" His curiosity couldn't be helped. What if he ran into one? He needed to be prepared.

"Froggers are a fierce humanoid creature. Their appearance in stature is mostly human, however they have incredible speed and agility. They're called Froggers because of their ability to jump repeatedly for great distances and their skin is a greenish-brown with random bumps on the surface," Seymour explained.

"Wonderful," said Sarantos.

"Sounds like the type of creature you wouldn't want to meet up close, so shoot them dead from a distance. Anyway, that's where my longbow comes in real handy," Derek remarked with a proud grin and slugged Sarantos playfully on the arm.

Seymour shook his head and added, "Their hide is tough and hard to penetrate. You have to hit them in the brain, eye or the middle of the chest. You have to aim true and it needs to hit the first time. We faced four Froggers that day and Marty took out three, I'm embarrassed to say."

"You're welcome." The cute little curly haired blonde chimed in as a charming smile crept upon her angelic face.

“We might be safe for now. It appears they have gone, or at least the Ogres are no longer trying to attack,” said Blayke, as he and Switch approached the group.

“Obviously, they were afraid of this dwarf and his axe.”

Blayke laughed and slapped his back, “Sorry, my friend, but I think it was the girl that finally frightened them off.”

Switch dropped his head and grumbled before agreeing, “Yes, I suppose you’re right, I hate to admit it though.”

A loud cry from the creatures startled their feeling of safety. The screams were dreadful and continued for a few minutes before subsiding. They’d been waiting for them to come out.

“Everyone be ready, something worse than those beasts has decided to have us for lunch.” Blayke yelled as he steadied himself in a fighting position.



Sarantos looked at Seymour and they both looked towards his sister. “She has nothing else to give for a day or so. Her energy is gone. We’ll have to fight this on our own.” The tormented voice of Marty’s brother was alarming.

Before he could reply, the ice somehow melted and the Ogres were instantly vaporized. The door disintegrated while the hinges clanked against the frame as if defeated. No one said a word. The shock prevented any response.

“What were you thinking running around in this chaotic world without us? Well, it seems we arrived in time to save you and also have lunch. Boy, what type of food do you have in that nice home on the hill?”

There stood the wizard, Adela, and Aurora (alias - Halo) smiling like three Cheshire Cats.

Suddenly, something rubbed against Sarantos. It was Mika!

“You ruined my door. Why did you ruin my door?” Seymour had run forward and looked at the empty space in front of him. “You could have used a little more finesse,” he complained.

“A simple thank you would’ve been nice,” grumbled the old wizard.

“Okay, thank you for ruining my door.”

Everyone burst out in laughter.

The wizard put his arm around Seymour, “No worries, young lad.” He turned and said a few words and waved his free arm as though he was dismissing someone. At once, a perfectly structured door appeared - stronger and with bolts that would pivot in place without needing to be lifted to latch. The wizard walked over to Marty and checked behind her ear and pulled out a key before placing it in her tiny hand. That will open the latches from the outside. Put the key in and the magic begins. The bolts will open and you can walk in whenever you desire. It will do the same when you leave. Even you can do it, angel.”

“Incredible, wizard. Anytime you want to destroy my door or anything for that matter you can be my guest!”

“Now, what about some lunch?”

The Ogres were gone. As they all walked out of the barn and headed up toward the house in anticipation of food and drink, Blayne carried little Marty who was now fast asleep.

Their cabin sat on top of a small sloping hill that certainly would allow for great visibility of anything happening in the general area. They started up a small stone path with a few scattered trees here and there. Sarantos smiled. It looked homey.

The inside of the cabin proved to be warm and well kept. The children did an amazing job making it a safe and cheery place to live.



Flowers were in a vase on the table and the smell of homemade bread filled the small room. It was a simple place, but full of love. The wooden floors were scrubbed and clean and the ashes in the fire were obviously attended to. Everything appeared in order. Sarantos walked to the windows and could see the countryside from any location in the cabin. This was such a clear view. No would be predators, both human or beast, could have a chance to sneak up on them here. The crops were neatly sowed. Goats were attending to the grass along the hillside. Cows and sheep moved freely about, but appeared to be content enough with their home to stay close by.

“Well done, Seymour,” said Sarantos. “Well done indeed.”

“What’s that Sarantos?”

“You and your sister have done a great job keeping this home in hand. I’m very impressed!”

The wizard already had an ale and was kicked back on a nice rug in front of the fire with Mika. They watched the young boy prepare a stew. The vegetables were huge. He added some sliced carrots the size of a ruler and added several things Sarantos didn’t know, but was sure he would enjoy.

The wizard, (Wallis) spoke up and broke the sweet silence that had taken over the room, “We’ve decided to wait for our contact to arrive in town. We feel it’d be much safer and after this ordeal, I think we’ve made the right decision.” He looked at Seymour, “I assume your parents have met with a horrible fate young lad?”

“Yes, but my sister and I do well enough on our own.”

“Your sister is a marvel and could use some guidance in her spell casting. This is Halo and she has spoken to me about your sister’s gift. She knows someone who could come stay and teach her, if you’re willing. It’s a woman of the same talent and she obviously has the understanding your sister needs. Her name is Alisa and she is an elderly woman who would love to be part of a family. She lost hers many years ago, as well.” The wizard stopped and allowed Halo to join in on the conversation.

“Young Seymour, we’ve no intention of interfering in your life but you would help her as well. She can come in a week’s time and you would know her by a symbol she wears on her robes and around her neck. A frosted red rose. How do you feel about this?”

“I admit it would be nice to have someone else here as family and if it would help my sister, then I couldn’t deny Marty Ellen this unique opportunity.”

“Good. She is a dear friend of mine and a very talented lady with many special skills. She’s healthy and agile with quite a few tricks up her sleeves, so to speak. She’s spoken to me lately about being lonely in her home. She does have several spry cats that she’d be sure to bring. Would that be okay?”

“Yes, my sister and I love cats and have thought of getting a few around here to help with the mice. It would come in handy. I have a spare room that my parents used. She can have that. My sister will be so pleased and it will do her good. I thank you so much.”

“It’s always my pleasure to assist those who have talent and help those who are kind and show promise, such as you and your sister. I’ve just sent her a telepathic message and she is preparing already and will arrive in two days instead of the week, my apologies,” Halo smiled warmly at the young boy.

He blushed and bowed his head. “You’re more than what you appear my lady, I believe you are much more.”



The wizard laughed and said, “You are wise young Seymour.”

Derek helped Seymour prepare dinner while the little girl slept soundly in her room. Sarantos just listened to the ongoing conversation among his friends and watched with amusement the sarcastic bantering of Blayke and Switch.

Dinner was excellent and listening to his friends talk reminded Sarantos once more

of Leigh. It felt like she'd been away from him for years. She'd been emotionally gone from their relationship for a while because of what she had become - a vampire. He hadn't understood that until he was about ready to call it quits. He'd lost his passion and started to lose his soul. The core of who he was! He couldn't feel it for so long. Then like a miracle she came back to him and he remembered the way she'd been with him in their few magical moments.

Right now, he felt he loved her fiercely. She was incomparable and full of mystery and strength. He wanted to save her, to bring her home...back to their home. He whispered, “Please believe in me - because I believe in you. I will find you. I will find you Leigh, if it's the last thing I do.”

“What? What's that you say Sarantos?” The wizard heard him whisper even though he and Adela were in an engaging conversation about the many uses of the plant Mernow - a very exotic plant with bright yellow flowers. It had very high medicinal properties.

Sarantos took a sip of a warm spiced ale and said, “Nothing important, Wallis. Just thinking out loud.”

“Oh, sure.” He quickly turned to Adela and they picked up the conversation where they’d left off.

Sarantos helped clean up and walked around the outside of the house with Derek and Seymour as the darker part of the day started to close in on them. Little Marty was still sleeping peacefully.

“Mary must be exhausted,” stated Sarantos as they stood admiring the corn field.

“Yes, she gets that way exceptionally fast and will sleep all night, I’m sure,” answered Seymour.

“She certainly is a charming girl,” said Sarantos.

“Yes, she’s been known to charm the orneriest men around. I think that’s part of her ability. It’ll be interesting having two of them around when Alisa shows up. I hope I can handle all that feminine charm!”

The three men chuckled.

“I wonder when we’re leaving? It’s getting late,” Derek remarked.

“I don’t know.”

Wallis came out and joined them, “It’s a beautiful night. A little chilly for an old wizard but nice just the same. You have an incredible stretch of land with so much healthy growth Seymour. I was thinking it’s getting late and we were wondering if we might just stay the night and get better acquainted. I would like that, but would you be okay with it?”

Adela came out into the cool evening to join them. She slipped her arm in Wallis’s and looked to the sky while the conversation continued.

“Sure, I’m enjoying the company. We’re leery of so many people that live in this land. Sometimes it’s frightening for us. We’re a different sort of people and that’s one reason my parents were killed. So now, I’m very cautious about anyone that approaches our land. We tend to take care of them quite promptly. I can’t have them harm me or my sister. It’s sadly drastically changed our approach towards strangers, but we’re still warm hearted underneath it all. I don’t know why my parents moved to such a chaotic place.”

“What were their names, Seymour?”

“Gerald and Belle Raliey and we were originally from the land of Yarrowtopia. I miss being there. It was much more peaceful.”



“Oh...no.” The wizard hung his head and tears appeared in the corners of his eyes. I knew your parents, they came here with Harry and Malena. I’m not sure exactly what they were working on, but he told me he hadn’t heard from them in a while and wasn’t sure if they were okay. Harry never came out here to see them, to avoid unwanted eyes from following him to their location. They wanted to protect you children. Apparently, what they were doing was very dangerous and cost them their lives. I grew up with all of them. Do you know Harry at the Inn?”

“Harry Dobs? I knew him in Yarrowtopia but never knew he was here as well. I suppose that answers a lot of unusual incidents. My father

never knew that I knew he went to the barn late at night to meet someone. I only saw a shadow, but never knew who it was.”

“Harry and Malena will be so unhappy when they hear this,” said the wizard.

Adela took Wallis’s hand and brought it to her mouth before she gently kissed it. She squeezed his hand and smiled at him with such a beautiful expression that Sarantos got a tear in his eye, remembering his time with Leigh.

Tonight, under these stars and watching the wizard and Adela, he would’ve sworn in that moment he caught a glimpse of how Leigh used to be with him. Her perfume filled his senses and he could feel her soft hair as it fell upon his chest. Leigh’s soft skin melted under his touch, like the finest silk. He could hear her

laugh at his corny jokes and watched as she planted their garden of Hollyhocks and Lavender. Those were some of her favorite flowers. In this vivid daydream, she raced him into the shower to use the last of the shampoo. He sat next to her by the warm fire on cold winter nights; he pulled her close just to smell her hair. Oh that silky sensuous hair. The thoughts of her were almost more than he could bear. He loved her so much and didn't want to lose the memory of her. Once he found her again, he vowed to never let her out of his sight. He prayed she hadn't given up hope and still believed in him the way he believed in them - together as a couple.

Sarantos choked back tears and looked to the stars. Wallis moved to his side and put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Believe in her Sarantos and in yourself, because we will find her and bring her home. We are closer now than ever before to end this horrible escapade."

He looked at the sincerity of the wizard's wise and ancient eyes and smiled for the briefest of moments. He believed him and could taste the anticipation of Leigh back in their home, in their room and in all their lives.

They stood outside for a while and watched the shooting stars fill the darkest sky lighting it up with hope. You could sense hope in the air tonight.

When Sarantos awakened, he felt more alive and closer to happiness than he'd felt in many years. *Leigh*.

He could smell food cooking and felt famished. Marty was already there and eating when he came into the room.

"Good morning," he said.

She laughed and said, "Good morning, man with the funny weapon."



He laughed and gave her a hug. He felt like she needed one with no parents around to give her those when she wanted one, although he thought her brother was quite good at supplying her with much warm love.

After breakfast they readied themselves to head back to town. Marty didn't want them to go and expressed her opinion quite openly.

"I think you should stay with us for a while. We could use the help and I don't want you to go." She said as that grin pulled at their hearts.

That's when her brother decided to tell her about Alisa. Her excitement was obvious as she danced around and hugged Halo for giving her such an amazing gift.

"Thank you!" Marty Ellen yelled as she threw her hands up to the sky, as if to thank the whole of the universe. She jumped on Mika's back. The big cat was a good sport and rode her around the house several times, causing Marty to hug the soft cat until she actually purred. Sarantos hadn't heard her do that in a long time.

Sarantos laughed with everyone else. She was uplifting. He grabbed his guitar and played a song for her. As he made up the words, he watched her face light up. It was a magical moment. He called the song *She Believes*. It was short and she learned the lyrics quickly. They then sang it together.

She followed them down the path to the road as the singing continued until they reached the woods. Marty hugged Sarantos and ran back to her house with her brother chasing her. The group walked towards the town until her giggles could no longer be heard.

Sarantos felt safe with this group as they walked along the path back towards town. He remembered he'd forgotten to hear the story of the Ogedogs. Oh, well, next time.



The wind was picking up and there was suddenly a chill in the air. It smelt wrong - the wind smelt wrong. He never realized there was a smell to wrongness before this moment. He got the chills. The chills made him shiver. The hairs on the back of his neck rose causing his head to swoon. No one else seemed to be aware of any type of discomfort or intrusion. Maybe he was coming down

with a cold or something.

“Does anyone...”

“*Hello Sarantos.*” A very seductive female voice said inside his mind that sent tingles down to his loins provoking an unexpected reaction.

God, it was definitely noticeable. “*Who and where are you?*”

This was not good because no one else appeared to notice he was uncomfortable. This frightened him. Halo should have heard, if no one else did.

“I’ve come to help you...Sarantos.” So sensual was her voice it almost caused him to fall to his knees, but he could feel her next to him holding him up, rubbing

against him as he walked. He couldn't speak and had trouble controlling his desires. When she whispered so close to his ear with such sultry tones...it happened. He had no control over his reaction to her sensual voice. Still they walked on. He could feel her presence almost inside of him gently moving him forward. She ignored what she caused and continued, "No one in your measly group can hear my kind..not even Aurora. Yes, I know who she is and her disguise can't escape me. Men are weak creatures, aren't they, Sarantos?"

All he could do was nod his head in agreement. Even as he fell behind the group, no one paid attention to him lagging in the rear. It was as though they were all under some sort of spell. He wanted to see her, to hold her, but fear seeped slowly into his mind...he knew instantly this was no vampire, but something more dangerous and deadly. *The women in these worlds would definitely be the death of him yet!*

When she spoke again it caused him to ache and he became immediately aroused, once more.