

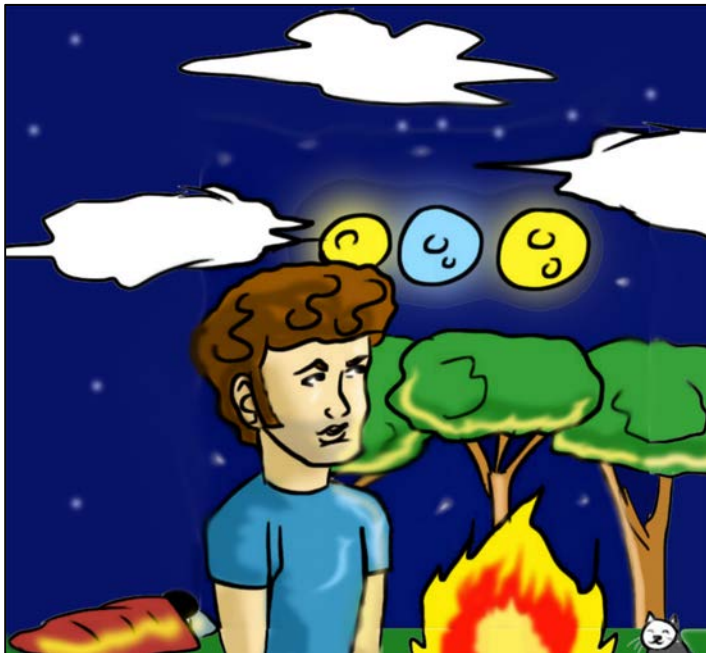
Chapter 4

“I Love to Love You, Too”

Sarantos and Sojan stood together and watched the last of the flames burn away the rotting flesh of the zombies. Leigh had apparently taken down quite a few before the wizard called her to his side, because there were many disgusting foul-smelling bodies scattered about the farmland.

Luckily for Sarantos, the remaining vampires had followed the wizard and Leigh when they had taken flight into the cold, sinister night sky. The vampires tracked them and pursued quickly through the trees. Some preferred to change into bats, while others chose to move effortlessly using their gift of unusual human speed which almost overtook the bats.

Once during a discussion on what it was like to be a vampire Leigh had explained to him how uncomfortable it was to be a changeling. She also had pointed out the grueling mentality of doing so and what a vampire would begin to lose. Most vampires considered themselves super-human, which meant they had a greater intellect, speed, strength and life span than that of their fellow humans. When the form of the bat was taken, the change in consciousness would automatically lower their psyche. When the changeling talent was used too often, it slowly removed their human qualities. They eventually would adapt to a more out-of-control animalistic behavior which could actually endanger their own life and ultimately



the very existence of all of the vampires. It was all rather complicated. Sarantos loved these conversations with Leigh. It helped give him a better understanding of her, and he wanted that oh so very much.

He worried for Leigh and hoped she and the wizard were safe. While the ashes smoldered, he attempted to send Leigh a message directly into her mind, *‘I wish you always knew, I want to be with you and I love to love you, too.’*

Sarantos looked up at the three moons that peeked out through the clouds. For a brief moment, he felt they looked directly at him and the sensation was so strong it sent a tense chill down his spine. The rain had stopped long enough to allow the burning of the corpses, but loud thunder in the distance meant the possibility of another downpour. In the country, a storm could be heard rumbling from miles away but sometimes storms would haphazardly change directions to deliver the rain somewhere else.

Sojan moved to stand next to Sarantos and put his arm around his shoulder. They stood there and stared at the ashes for a moment, then turned slowly away leaving behind the dreadful nighttime memories buried in the residue of flames.

Derek had fallen asleep in a big stuffed chair by the fire while Mika lay curled up on the rug at his feet.

Sarantos walked quietly over to Mika and checked on her breathing. It was steady and she appeared comfortable. Derek had done a splendid job on dressing her wound.

He walked back over to the table where Sojan had poured them both a cup of coffee. Sojan pulled out a chair and sat down while exhaling a long and heavy sigh. His wife and daughter's death had left him aged and lacking his customary fun-loving spirit. Sarantos respected him as a business owner and had assisted him many times at his pub. He served his customers with a joyful demeanor that Sarantos found quite refreshing. Even so, today Sojan's anguish ran deep and he felt genuinely saddened for him and his situation.

Sarantos picked up the coffee that had been poured for him and said, "Sojan you get some rest. I'll keep watch over this house for the rest of the night. You've had a rough day and I'm quite used to doing well on very little sleep."

Sarantos sat down as Sojan stood. He pulled a forced smile from somewhere in spite of his despair and patted Sarantos on the back, "Well, my friend, it seems we're bound by circumstance. I accept your kind offer." Sojan covered his son with a warm colorful quilt and left the room.

Sarantos sat there for a few minutes and uneasily finished his coffee. He began to feel a draft and realized they hadn't shut the window. He walked over and peered outside. The night air smelled of a coming storm and the freshness of it recharged his spirit. He loved the rain and the stillness of the evening comforted his thoughts. The barn sat there looming in the darkness and appeared to be untouched from the evening's events, maybe old Barnaby did own a secret that worked to keep vampires away. He pulled the shutters closed and latched them tightly.

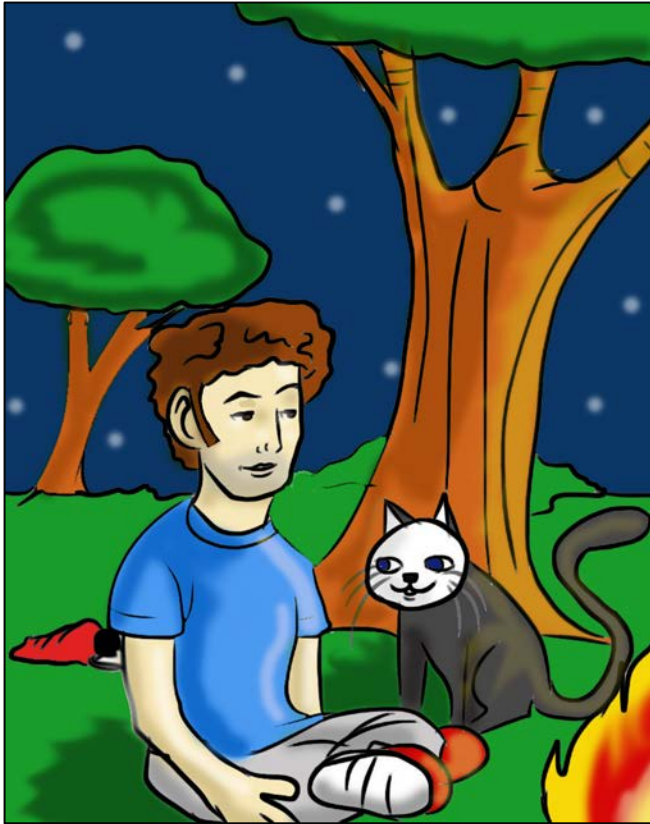
He refilled his cup and sat back down. While they slept and the house was quiet Sarantos worked diligently on new lyrics to assist in the battle with the undead. As a Bard he had the unique opportunity to sing his spells. It was an incantation put to music. Today he'd finished two spells that were started a couple of weeks ago, but because they were vocal he would have to practice them later. He couldn't wait to hear them. His favorite one and possibly his best ever was, '*The Electric Sizzle*.' It was written for the zombies with a rap feel to it and was quite cool. The song started out with words and a tempo that would create loud lightening in the sky and then during the chorus when he yelled, *sizzle*, some bolts would form a hand and point two fingers at a couple of chosen zombies to light them up and instantly burn them where they stood. Quite creative he thought. He wrote a new one for the vampires called 'Bite This' that would temporarily turn the necks of five humans within a certain radius into stone, which should obviously break the teeth of any vampire with an over-zealous appetite. The intended victims would of course return to normal after the song was over. This one had a very heavy rock sound with a club rhythm to it.

Sarantos was concerned about the zombies working with the vampires because to him that meant only one thing - a very powerful wizard controlled them. What else would cause them to be under such a persuasive influence? The typical zombie was a renegade, hanging with its own kind. A magic user controlling the zombies and leading the vampires was too powerful and dangerous to even think about though.

"You're right, my friend," Mika had spoken inside his mind.

He felt joy when he heard her voice. He wiped a tear away as he went to her and sat on the floor beside the big cat. Derek was still asleep so they continued the conversation without speaking.

"I have a lot of questions."



“I thought you might. Let’s start with telepathy. Yes, the wizard and I have always been able to communicate telepathically. The elf and wizard are of a different race, as is Leigh. She’s called a Hecateian. They’re a race of telepathic and long-lived healers that can only heal themselves. We can all speak inside the minds of whomever we choose. We try not to infringe on others’ thoughts unless absolutely necessary.”

“Well, I suppose I already knew Leigh was a special lady, but I’m glad she can heal herself after seeing the wounds she had all over her body. It makes me feel a little bit better. What happened to you? I worry about leaving you alone. Why

did the wizard have to rush off so quickly?”

“I’ll be okay. Remember I was magically made by Wallis and that offers me many advantages. There are only two ways I can die. I’m his familiar, so if he dies I die. The other way is for him to destroy me using the very magic that created me. But I can still be severely injured and take many weeks to heal.”

The shock of what he learned produced a verbal blurting out, *“Oh, I suppose that’s a good thing - that there are only two ways for you to die!”*

The cat continued to speak telepathically, “Wallis left quickly because the vampires attacked our home, and they now know about Leigh. She can no longer hide and they consider her a threat to them...and, Sarantos, they came for Leigh.”

“No,” Sarantos said a little too loudly causing Derek to stir.

Mika’s voice stayed inside his mind and continued calmly speaking, “Daniel has been slain. He sacrificed himself to give warning to me and Blayke. We were able to defend ourselves and seal the home. We knew the vampire’s minds and they had decided to head to Brazon’s when they couldn’t penetrate the magic that was

placed on our home. That's where the wizard and Leigh went. Don't worry. Your friend will be fine. He's in good company."

"Yes, I'm sure you're right." Sarantos had learned over the years that his best friend had an uncanny survival mechanism that worked for him and those around him.

"You should also know the wizard belongs to a race of shape shifters. Each of them is blessed with two different changeling abilities. Some never discover theirs until they're quite old and others never find out what they might have been during their long lifetime. Wallis discovered one of his at quite a young age. He was about five and decided he wanted to fly. He was always very independent so was watched over very closely by his mother. One day he was left alone for only a few minutes and started running along the ground until he picked up speed, opened his arms and proceeded to jump off a cliff that overlooked the Rosilian Ocean, named for its rose-like color. Lucky for him he changed into the eagle before crashing into a rather large outcrop of razor-sharp rocks. He might have picked up on an inner voice that had given him insight into this particular changeling entity. The every day normal situation could bring out their changeling sides. Their nature isn't like that of a vampire. Vampires were human. The changeling is part of whom Wallis is, so he can control the urge to adapt to animalistic behavior."



The light was filtering through the closed shutters. It looked to be a real dreary day.

Derek suddenly bolted upright into a sitting position and then quickly stood up. Without hesitation he grabbed his weapon and headed toward the window. Sarantos leaped to his feet and ran across the room for his guitar.

Sarantos arrived at the window just after Derek.

The boy stood there in a trance-like state.

“What’s wrong, Derek,” Sarantos questioned?

“Sorry. I think I was having a bad dream and it must have awakened me and I responded too quickly.”

Sarantos chuckled, “Well, at least we had a great response time.” He caught his breath and tried to control his racing heart. He knew it was pounding from the anticipation of battle and fear.

Derek undid the latch on the window and opened the shutters. He grinned at Sarantos and looked outside and quickly surveyed the surrounding area. His shoulders lifted in a sheepish shrug and he said, “I needed to check anyway, just in case it wasn’t a dream.”

Sarantos really liked that kid and patted him on his back while joining in the search for vampires or zombies. They were less likely to come out during the day, but it had been known to happen, especially since a magic user was now their new leader.

They both joined Barnaby outside and watched as he walked the horses to the corral where they could peacefully graze. The cows were already chewing grasses from the hillside while chickens and pigs were busy eating their feed. To their left the cottage fields of crops ran all the way to the tree line, and as the sun rose over the distant tree tops it threw eerie colors of pink and orange over the playful meadows. Just then it started to sprinkle and a slight rainbow lit up the early morning.

Sarantos took a deep breath of the sweet morning dew and thought about what Mika had told him about herself and his other friends. He guessed no situation before this had ever arisen for her to share a deeper reflection of these people he had grown to love and admire.

Derek had offered to make breakfast and Barnaby joined them for a very hearty meal.

Sarantos thanked Derek and spoke to Barnaby, “I guess you heard the battle last night, Barnaby?”

“Nope. Slept like a baby, I did.”

Sarantos smiled and knew this man would never share his secrets so he simply said, “I’m glad.”

Breakfast went by quickly and Sarantos knew he needed rest, “Derek and Mika you’re in charge since Sojan is still resting. I must sleep. Then we’ll see if our friends have returned, if not, I may want to head over to Brazon’s place.”

“Yes, Mika and I can handle the watch,” said Derek with pride.

“Well, I’ll be wandering around outside and if I see anything stirring you’ll be sure to know,” Barnaby stated with dignity.

“Well, then I leave you to it and will grab some shut eye,” Sarantos said as he left the room to sleep in one of the small bedrooms to the west of Sojan’s.

Sarantos awoke right before dusk, and laid in bed thinking about his nightmares while the last of the day’s light sent shadows flickering about the soundless room.

He felt quite good even though he hadn’t slept very well. He was overwhelmed by fitful dreams of Leigh. He saw her sitting in a dark place, bloody and screaming out his name, but he had trouble reaching her, as he seemed trapped in interlaced corridors that were filled with a thick purple mist making it difficult to see and breathe. The smell was musty and laden with a heavy scent of jasmine. He came across many intricately designed doors. Some were locked. When he managed to find a door that did open, he stood staring into deep chasms that couldn’t be possibly entered except by death. Periodically, he would awaken in a cold sweat and when he eventually fell back to sleep the same dream would recur. It had unnerved him and he needed to know if Leigh was okay.

The house was tranquil as Sarantos stepped out into the warmest room of the small cottage. A great smelling stew was bubbling inside a big black cauldron that hung from a thick metal rod over the blazing fire.



The door opened bringing in the cool breeze and Sojan, with more firewood held inside a large leather arm carrier. He smiled and threw a couple more logs on the flames before putting the rest of them in a giant log box built inside the wall. He grabbed a large metal ladle that hung over a hook on the stone fireplace and stirred the stew.

“Dinner’s ready,” he said while playfully smacking his chops.

The door flew open again and Derek came in holding onto an extremely large sack that had a variety of herbs sticking out of the top. He threw the bag at Sarantos and yelled, “Catch.”

Sarantos felt impressed with himself over his quick reaction and incredible reflexes as he grabbed the sack without losing a single herb. He shouted out a loud cheer. Derek gave him a thumbs-up, a gesture he’d learned from Sarantos.

Mika bounded in behind the boy and ran to nuzzle around Sarantos, and purred at his return from the world of the sleep deprived.

“You seemed to sleep well, my friend,” Sojan commented while filling the bowls with stew and placing them on the table.

Barnaby came in holding two bottles of ale and sat them by the food, “Smells mighty good, Sojan.”

Sarantos placed a few mugs on the table along with a huge loaf of warm bread that had been wrapped in a white cotton cloth to preserve the heat.

They all sat down together and without a word slurped up the hearty soup. Sarantos watched Derek as he dipped a broken piece of bread into his stew and then shoved the juice-saturated slice into his waiting mouth. He was glad the boy was so resilient. Sarantos vowed, at that moment, to be there to help Derek's father in protecting the last member of his family.

Sarantos broke the silence, "I feel we should all head over to Brazon's tonight, immediately after dinner."

All three men looked up at once. Mika sighed from in front of the fire, where she rested. She'd already hunted for the day and was quite sated.

He had given them a moment to take in what he said, finished chewing a warm piece of bread and then continued, "I'm concerned for their safety. It's been too long since we've heard from them. Mika is too far away to communicate with them."

"I can go by myself and check on them. I'm quite fast," she purred.

"No, Mika. I don't think it's any longer wise to be caught alone in this part of the world. There's too much at stake and they've become too strong through their leader. I can't leave here without the three of you attending me, because I consider us bound until we see this battle concluded."

He never mentioned his dream about Leigh and didn't want to discuss with them how he needed to prove his love for her. He believed life was like a song and you sang and danced your way through it. There was no dance he wouldn't do to prove his love for Leigh. He knew that now and accepted it.

"Well, I must be stayin' here. Them animals need tending to. I be right here lookin' after the farm," Barnaby stated and went right back to enjoying his hot dinner.

Sojan patted his son on the back, "What do you think Derek? Shall we join our friend?"

Derek smiled and winked at his dad, "Well, the way I see it we have no choice. He'd be lost without us and never make it on his own. You saw how he caught that

bag I threw him, like an eight year old and he was barely able to get there in time. Nope, we can't leave him on his own!"

Sarantos laughed and was delighted that Derek still kept his sense of humor, "You're right, my friends, I would be lost without the two of you, or Mika. We must leave as soon as we're finished eating, before it gets too dark. At least it's only a couple of hours away."



They all nodded in agreement and finished their meal without another word. Sarantos wondered where their thoughts might be and hoped they would all stay safe from harm during the next year. He worried it would take that long or maybe longer to eliminate the impending doom of the blood-thirsty vampires.

It was starting to get dark and they were still an hour away.

Sarantos made sure they had packed food, all medical supplies from the cottage, and the available elixirs and herbs, including the ones that Derek had just picked that morning.

Mika was out in the lead and came to an immediate halt. Sarantos watched the big cat and knew she was listening to something no one else in this group was privy to. She turned and appeared to look directly into him with eyes that signaled alarm, sadness, and urgency.

Her emotions filled his thoughts, "You were right my friend. They've been fighting an army all night and day with little rest. The vampires left when there

were only a few remaining and within hours would return with another army. Wallis had no idea there were so many. He knew they had waited and planned for this moment. I must go forward without you. Hurry, as fast as you can.”

With that said, Mika turned and was gone.

Sarantos was flooded with anguish, not knowing who might be hurt. Sojan and Derek rode up next to him.

“We’ve gone easy on the horses, but now we must flee. Time is of the utmost importance,” he yelled in an urgent voice and sent his horse off into the closing darkness as the mare’s mane billowed behind her long narrow face.

Derek gave what sounded like a battle cry and followed close behind. His father sent his horse chasing after both of them.

The horses were breathing heavily as they came up over the dull hill and looked into the valley where Brazon’s home sat. The moon lit up the valley and they could see part of the herb gardens had been torched, but the raging flames didn’t get far. Apparently someone had put them out before the plants could be destroyed. Small fires covered the area with what Sarantos hoped would be burning zombies. Mika



moved quickly between the trees, but he couldn’t see what she was doing.

Sarantos faced his two companions and saw resolve and no trace of fear in their eager eyes. They nodded together and as one small but determined group, they charged into the fray.

The boy was fast and light riding his horse in between zombies and slicing their heads from their bodies without hesitation. Then he shifted in his seat and leaned over to dodge the swooping of several bats.

Sarantos wielded a long sword that Barnaby had hammered into a finely crafted silver blade. It was well balanced and extremely lightweight. He sliced several rabid zombies and stayed close to his two companions. Two silver arrows shot past his head and destroyed the bats that were circling around for another attack at the young Derek. Sarantos turned in the direction where the arrows had been released, and out of the woods Muriele raced across the road and disappeared into the trees. He smiled slightly and was glad to know she was watching their backs.

The existing battle lasted for only a short time when Sarantos heard a scream and three vampires raced past him and Derek running back to their lair to gather another army.

For a time they would have a reprieve.

The three companions stood facing the home of the alchemist when Brad quickly came out a large wooden door and started collecting zombie bodies and throwing them in many piles. He saw Sarantos, but only nodded and continued carrying on his task. Sarantos and his companions joined in gathering dead zombies. Sojan went around and lit them on fire.

Brazon had a middle-aged caretaker who immediately attended their tired horses. A beautiful young girl with angelic qualities assisted him and pulled all the supplies from their leather pouches and delivered them indoors. The horses were then led by the man to an underground barn where they would be fed and washed down. Sarantos watched them as he helped his companions clear the area of zombie bodies.

The young girl came back out with a sack of food and headed to the underground buildings. A man about Sarantos age came up from the barn and headed to the herb fields with a couple of large sacks. He quickly proceeded to fill them up and headed back underground. Sarantos could see the path that sloped down to the huge red barn from where he stood. Then his friend Brad stopped collecting bodies and stood in front of the sloped ground. He pulled down four different wooden doors and closed off the entrance.

The front door of the cottage burst open and Wallis hurried out and moved toward the barn without so much as a hello. He had spoken softly to Brad and then started an incantation. The door to the barn became invisible and the wizard turned toward

a large pile of boulders that sat in a clearing and moved his hands while speaking a few magic words until the rocks lifted into the air and then easily sat down in front of the door so no one would bother the entrance.

Wallis and Brad moved toward Sarantos and his group, as Muriele and Mika came out of the woods to join them.

The reunion was wonderful, but would soon be short lived.

Blayke and Brazon were sleeping in several back rooms of the alchemists home.

The rest of them sat at the table listening to what had been happening since Leigh and the wizard left the farm. The wizard explained about Brazon's creative and life-saving underground living quarters. He had built everything around a cave that embodied a fresh stream where he grew many herbs, food and spices. There were sleeping quarters, cooking arrangements, a place for eliminating bodily waste and a room set up just for storing potions, which were all named, categorized and dated. The wizard chuckled and patted himself on his back for coming up with and supplying magical means to supply light for the plants to grow. There were several openings for two fireplaces that acted as a chimney stack. They had supplied many airways for the barn and living quarters, so all of the necessary oxygen demands were fulfilled. Additionally, all were magically blocked from view.

Wallis turned to a more serious topic about what they had been doing to fight off the undead and how each person had an important role to play in this game of survival. Brazon had many hands that helped him over the years take care of his land and assist in the building of his underground lair. They still lived and worked here inside a small village buried from prying eyes.

The wizard's eyes lit up and he said, "The reason Brazon had even thought to do this was a blessing and I must share this story with you..."

'One night Brazon heard a loud thump on his front doorstep and grabbed his weapon before approaching the door. When he opened it, he was quite surprised to find a young girl of about five years of age laying there with a mass of red curls surrounding her small face. Brazon is a kind man and quickly brought her inside and put her on a soft chair close to the fire where he could check her out. He found her alive, but weak and with no outward injuries he thought the poor child must be

hungry. Brazon heated up some of his leftover dinner. He lifted her head then



gently fed her and gave her drink, until she couldn't drink or eat anymore. She slept peacefully during the rest of the evening as he sat beside her keeping watch.

He was up and cooking her a meal, patiently waiting for her to awaken. When she finally awoke, her smile lit up the room and warmed Brazon's heart. It was that precise enlightened moment when he decided to care for this apparently orphaned girl, but she brought with her a gift.

She walked over to Brazon, put her tiny hand in his and said,

“My name is Arial and my race is the Durian. You probably have never heard of us, because we exist only to serve one person and live on another plane of existence. At five years of age, which would be about twenty-five years old in human life, we travel on a spiritual quest. We are required to fast and give up food and drink. Then between three and ten days we have a vision and seek out the master of our calling. We find our way to them and if they respond in kindness and save us, our secrets are shared and we are bound to them for their entire lifetime. After their death, we have earned our freedom to go back to our homeland and live in peace among our people. We are usually enlightened by serving others. If we are left, and not cared for, then we will die and vanish into dust. I bring you a warning and a message of survival. Together we will build an underground cavern to protect you, your home and those you love, because there is a great peril upon this land and it grows in strength and numbers. I have the gift of sight and humbly offer it to you.”

The wizard sat back and smiled when his story was finished. Then he said, “This beautiful creature is now ten and has been like a daughter to him. You never met her before, because she had spent most of her time under the surface preparing for

this day. Brazon shared her thoughts with me and we knew the danger was fast approaching. You might have seen her today, she assisted with the horses.”

A door opened in the direction of a small hallway and Leigh walked into the room. She looked as though she just stepped out of a spa. She had everyone’s attention and was glowing and beautiful.

Mika nudged Sarantos’s thoughts, “She may look refreshed, but don’t be fooled. She’s just healed herself. It was the first time she’d stopped fighting since they arrived here. She was very badly beat up and must surely still be exhausted.”

Leigh smiled at Mika. Sarantos wanted to love her for she was so breathtaking. Although she looked at the big cat, her voice tiptoed inside his head like footsteps gently splashing along a stream, “I’m so glad to see you, and I received your message.”

His heart almost exploded as it sank to his stomach causing him to become very lightheaded. She had heard him that one memorable night under the moon when he expressed his desire for her love.

Mika moved to the door and said to everyone in the room, “They return and we have little time to prepare. They bring someone evil with them. I feel her. It is a woman leader, a powerful and vengeful magic user. She has but one fear – Leigh!”

The room noisily erupted into action. Mika bounded to the back rooms and brought Brazon and Blayze running with weapons in hand.

“Everyone outside,” the wizard yelled.

When they opened the door and went out into the cool night air, they could see hundreds of dark shadows walking and crawling over the distant hills that led directly into the valley.

The door was shut behind them. Brazon put a few more potions inside a large metal chest that was set outside on the porch. The wizard turned and began an incantation that rose in power, until the whole house was sealed in one large mass of rock.



Sarantos started singing a protection song that would take a few minutes but when complete, would release a spell onto his companions giving them the ability to avoid each first attack that would be made on them and would give them a chance to hit before their opponents. Muriele waited with her silver arrows ready to take out the approaching vampires in any form they took. Her eyes were keen and her hand steady. Brazon had several potions in his hands and stood like a menacing entity that you wouldn't want to mess with. Brad was next to Sarantos with a stern expression and held a potion in one hand and a long sword in the other one.

He'd become quite proficient with the sword over the past two years. They had hardly had a chance to say hello, before they found themselves thrown to the vampires so to speak. Derek and his father stood side by side ever faithful and ready for battle. Blayke also had a bow out, but his blades were still sheathed by his sides. Wallis looked like a harmless old man, except for his eyes. They displayed ancient wisdom. Mika stood like a statue that had lifelike qualities. Then there was Leigh. She looked like a queen ready to be crowned, but her eyes held fiery flames.

The vampires were taking their time approaching with a confidence that came from their leader.

Sarantos heard the twang of the arrows to either side of him and the speed with which they were reloaded and delivered again was unheard of in his old world. The elf's hands couldn't be seen. Then she was gone into the woods to his left, but she still stood next to him. He wasn't sure which one was an illusion.

Blayke moved to the right side of the woods and Brad followed. Screams could be heard as the army of vampires approached. Sarantos knew the wizard set magical traps around the vicinity of the land that appeared to be working nicely. He could

see arrows shot from both sides of the woods and they were hitting the surprised vampires disintegrating them in front of their comrades, as they approached the heavily wooded area surrounding the house.

The vampires started to let out a death-defying shrill as they arrived at the edge of the trees before proceeding down the path that led to Brazon's home. Sarantos could see them clearly and he started singing a song that was meant to keep the undead from entering an area of 20 feet in a circumference all around him. He saw the zombies behind them and they were just now coming down the hill moving with their typical slow pace.

The wizard spoke a few words and held out his hands letting off ten silver daggers that all found their target. Sarantos watched as bodies turned to vapors and dissipated into the tense night.

He could feel Leigh next to him breathing heavily and Mika was in a tense stance ready to bolt.

Out of the woods in the direction of Blayke and Brad rose a blue mist accompanied by several deafening screams. Derek and Sojan went off into the woods to assist the elf with hand-to-hand combat against the undead beasts.

Brazon handed the wizard one of his potions and he drank it quickly. A glowing white shield seemed to cover his body as he leapt forward with his staff in hand. The alchemist gave a drink of the same potion to Mika and the same shield surrounded her as she moved forward and crouched next to the wizard. Several bats flew overhead, but were greeted with quick arrows ripping thru their heads.

The majority of the vampires had run off into the dense woods. But down the middle of the path walked twenty vampires heading straight for the wizard, when they suddenly split off and separated into either side of the woods.

One person stood alone, with a fearless and beautiful dignity. Her clothes shimmered around her body, as if they were part of her flesh, to watch the sheer pieces of material move so seductively around her was stimulating and intoxicating.

Even as Sarantos stared at this magnificent woman in front of him, screams emitted from both sides of the woods. Leigh hissed and swayed on her feet next to

him and he felt her tension, but his focus went back to the wizard/vampire who stood defiantly in front of them.

Her face was pure and creamy, her lips were red, full and luscious. Her eyes danced like the waves of a green ocean as she held him spellbound. Her hair fell effortlessly to her waist moving gently like golden diamonds cascading down a waterfall and sparkling with the motion of a breeze on a cool autumn morning She was wickedly perfect in confidence, body shape and beauty. Sarantos suddenly realized he wasn't breathing...

He was next to the woods and didn't know how he had gotten there. The wizard had lit up the back hills with lightening bolts that were dancing around searing the zombies before they made it to the tree outcrops. He saw the big cat still crouched by the wizard, but they both had moved forward twenty feet, at least. Brazon was standing next to Sarantos speedily handing him a potion. He took it and drank it all while remembering his vow to never touch the stuff again. He gagged and realized it must be an acquired taste. He looked for Leigh but she was gone.



Then the wizard screamed and caused Sarantos to look in that direction. Out of the woods jumped Leigh and she landed on top of the female vampire, but she only appeared amused. Mika pounced at the vampire to distract her, but it didn't work. She held up her hand and the cat flew backwards and hit Sarantos causing them both to lay sprawled on

the ground. He hurt from the impact and wasn't sure he could stand when three vampires came out of the woods looking at him with their mouths agape and their wretched fangs wanting his tasty melodic blood. He barely had time to think, as Brad and Blayke came from nowhere and were next to him with swords blazing and moving together in sync toward the nasty vampires.

Sarantos heard the wizard performing an incantation using horrible words that hurt his ears. A gust of wind turned into a tornado and swirled around the female vampire and Leah.

The tornado had subsided before Sarantos could get up off the ground. Mika was already back at the wizard's side.

The she-vampire stood there holding Leigh by her hair and then a darkness came out of her hands spreading down Leigh's body until she was gone. The sounds around the area stopped. Sarantos thought he'd gone deaf, until he heard Leigh scream his name. She was in his head causing a violent head rush, "Sarantos, help me. Sarantos!"

"No," he screamed. He wanted to prove his love to her and show her how much he loved her. Their life together was their song and it was time for him to step out onto the dance floor and prove to her his love could conquer anything she wanted.

He pulled himself up off the ground. The pain was unbearable but he loved her. She needed him! He felt an incredible strength move into his hands and knew he could rip apart this vampire who stood between him and his love.

Sarantos charged the demon vampire.



He heard Wallis scream at him to stop. As he ran by him, his mind was on one thing, Leigh.

The wizard was saying something that made no sense. Then it happened. His nightmare became reality. He was surrounded by a purple mist. He began running down corridors searching for the one woman he loved. Her voice echoed in his mind, but she was banished to a place unknown.

Sarantos collapsed into the mist and let the vapors drown him, as he wept in frustration over his failure. He closed his eyes and relived all the mistakes he'd made with Leigh and tried to send her a mental message, "I love

you. I love to love you.”

Her voice enveloped all thoughts he had ever had. His brain felt like it would rupture when her complete essence filled his mind and she replied, “Sarantos, save me. I am lost!”

The scent of jasmine made it hard for Sarantos to breathe.