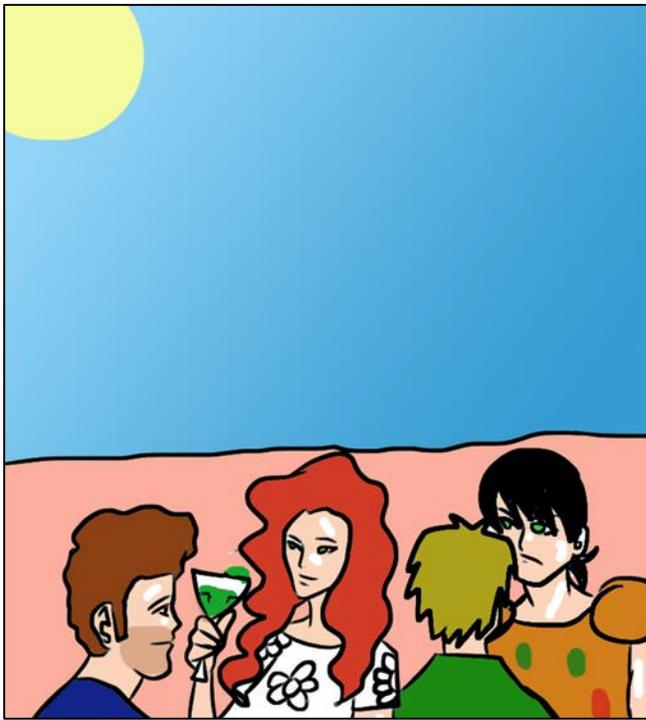


Chapter 5

“A Misión of Heart”

Sarantos fell helplessly into the water, right in front of the hydra. He watched Wallis as he skillfully threw several vials of water taken from the pool of the cave directly onto the hydra’s body. The creature reared up constantly changing its appearance from one hideous form to another. Each beast configuration was more frightening than the last, as it swiftly faded in and out of existence. It was similar to watching many different types of horror flicks briskly all in less than a minute. The only thing that had been missing from this experience was some popcorn.



His scream echoed in the distance and suddenly, he found himself on a pink sandy beach sipping pacifying margaritas with Leigh, Brad, and Blayke. The warmth of the sun and the smell of coconuts made him relax and smile with pleasure. Then Brad and Blayke disappeared. Leigh turned to him with smoldering eyes and teasingly took off her long flowered dress. She was naked. He couldn’t control his increased heartbeat or the way his tongue brimmed with saliva. She slowly pulled him out of his beach chair and seductively removed his shirt and pants. Suddenly pushing him to the ground, she jumped on

him like a crazed vampire. Her movements were utter perfection and her bare breasts were covered with tropical sand. She dropped her head down and instinctively pulled his head to the side sinking her teeth into his neck. He was ready to burst.

“Good grief, Sarantos. Wake up!”

He moaned and moved ever so slightly - slowly opening his eyes to see the wizard standing over him like an anxious vulture. He realized his body had instantly reacted to the dream.

The wizard continued, “Well, cover that thing up. It’s not something I want to see.”

Sarantos heard Blayke laughing uncontrollably from across the room.

It appeared everyone knew what was happening except for him. “What’s going on?”

“What’s going on? I’ll tell you. I got rid of that creature in your nightmare and recreated a good one instead, sending that dream creature back home. That’s what’s going on, if you must know. Why do I always bother to save you??”

“You people are sick. Really sick. Leigh was naked, you know!”

“We know,” Blayke chuckled.

“You saw her?”

“Pay him no mind, Sarantos. I was alone in your dream handling the dire situation.”



“Well, the least you could have done was allow me to finish my dream. I hate waking up right in the middle of the best part!”

“Bah . . . you’re lucky I saved you from the first dream. They’re not called Deathdreamers for the heck of it, you know. Some afflicted people have been known to die because of the enchanting dreams those creatures create. Do you actually think all people that perish in their sleep die of natural causes?”

Sarantos started gagging on the drool left in his mouth from the dream with Leigh. “What? You’ve got to be kidding me, wizard? Are you telling me these Deathdreamers can sometimes cause the death of innocent people sleeping in their own home? That’s too much to comprehend right now. I thought they don’t cross over into our world freely?”

“Well, there you go. That’s exactly why we had to come and retrieve them. Your world is much too vulnerable to them and their compelling manipulations. Most of your kind spends their lives in fear of something, and never understands that fear kills their physical, spiritual and mental health. So Deathdreamers would thrive in your world. Once in a while they cross over, but we try to keep tabs on them because everyone has a right to die naturally of course. We don’t want them affecting the outcome of someone’s life. It’s not natural, although, some would argue about that I guess.”

Brad was listening quietly until the wizard finished. “That’s really kind of cool, when you think about it. They don’t mean any harm. It’s just the nature of their existence. The neutral acts of nature. It just does what it does to exist. Tell me, wizard, do the Deathdreamers benefit by creating nightmares, or is it just built into their way of life?”

“I like your curiosity, Brad. A good sign of an alchemist is to question everything. For the most part, it’s built into their way of life and they don’t need to create the nightmares to live; however, for them it’s like a buzz one might get from a fine wine. If the person dies in the dream that is created by the Deathdreamers, then their power intensifies and the dreams become more frightening for their next victim. You know, it’s a prestigious thing for them. Almost like a badge of honor.”

“Sure. I get it. Every species seems to have their own internal battles with adversaries to display their power. Kind of crazy when you stop and think about it.”

“Yes, it is.” The wizard said while nodding his head and pulling on his whiskers.

“You find mankind and the cruel acts of nature to be confusing, Wallis?”

“Sarantos, I understand nature. It struggles to survive and has a pattern to follow. Man has a choice and that gift shouldn’t be taken so lightly. It needs to be appreciated and used to properly align itself with the natural universal flow all around us. Man fights against the truth of what is, so they continually make the same mistakes over and over. Everything they do has to have man’s so called logic attached to whatever it is they don’t understand. They attempt to define it and give it a name so they can make a new law governing it thereby excusing their behavior and mistakenly thinking they are allowing for justice. That makes me irritated.”

“I don’t know, but I find man to be a creature tender in his heart. Oh, sometimes they claim they have more rights than they do and fight for those rights, occasionally alone in the dark. Most men are on their own mission, you know some are a protector of their own, like I was with Leigh. She was mine and I would do anything to be her man and protect her. My fire burned to find her when she was missing. I want to take care of her until I draw my last breath.”

“Oh, balderdash! The mission should be to protect the entire world, not just one person. We own nothing and the sooner men realize that the sooner they can get on with their lives and stop being so self centered. Then they might learn something more important than ownership. We need to give back to the beautiful world that gives us life. Look around at all the miracles belonging to nature. Each person offers their own gift to the world, respect that because we, my friend, own nothing but our own truism of who we are and what we do!”

“That’s fine, Wallis. But, I wanna do what I want and be myself and nobody else. I want to bring peace and joy to the world. Your world. My world. Any world that I am in!”

“Pure delusion, Sarantos. You don’t even know who you are, for the most part. Your world designed you and you use others to describe yourself. Peace and joy? What’s joy and who’s peace. It’s based on your own perception of what you consider joy and peace. I don’t understand what that means? Some children might not find joy in ice cream, sprinklers or skateboarding. Some men might find joy in harming others. Peace for some is not hearing sirens at night, for others peace is sitting in a jacuzzi on a beach. Peace can be a good crop for some farmers or a rainy night after a drought for other farmers. Joy can be hearing a baby cry to a mother who loves any sound it makes. Joy can be two clowns driving in on one of your wild cars screaming, drinking and robbing local stores. Who are you to judge the peace and joy of others? Bring it to yourself, my friend. Find it in you. Look inside yourself! If I teach you nothing else, I hope you understand this one thing.”

“Wow, okay, Wallis. I didn’t mean to get you all fired up. I get what you’re saying. Maybe, I do need to rethink the way I view things. I suppose my world did design me, so now I need to work on remaking myself.”

“Good to hear. Enough of this talk. I’m being informed by Mika that Leigh is under attack in her own dream right now as we speak. I believe that’s the last Deathdreamer.”

One minute the old wizard was there arguing and the next second he vanished into thin air.

“Well, that’s that, Brad. We’re mad!”

Both men began laughing.



“The wizard’s right, you know. You shouldn’t laugh about such things. Your world is full of shallow behavior and Wallis has always fought for others’ rights to be who they are. He accepts me and all his friends as we are, no conditions. There is no fakeness. He understands that each man has a lone mission. A mission of his own heart’s volition.”

The familiar voice startled the two friends, as Sergio moved out of the darkness and into the light of the dingy room where the moon eagerly enhanced his finely chiseled face and pale complexion.

“Sergio! Hey, welcome back,” said Brad.

“We’re just having a little fun at the wizard’s expense now that he’s no longer here. We understand though, Sergio. Wallis is very wise and we respect his wise thoughts.”

“Okay, Sarantos. So long as the two of you aren’t making fun of him, I’m fine with your laughter.”

“Where’s the old dwarf?”

“I left him downstairs drinking his way into unconsciousness,” replied Sergio.

“Oh. Well, I’m still tired. I’m going to bed. Good night, Brad and Sergio.”

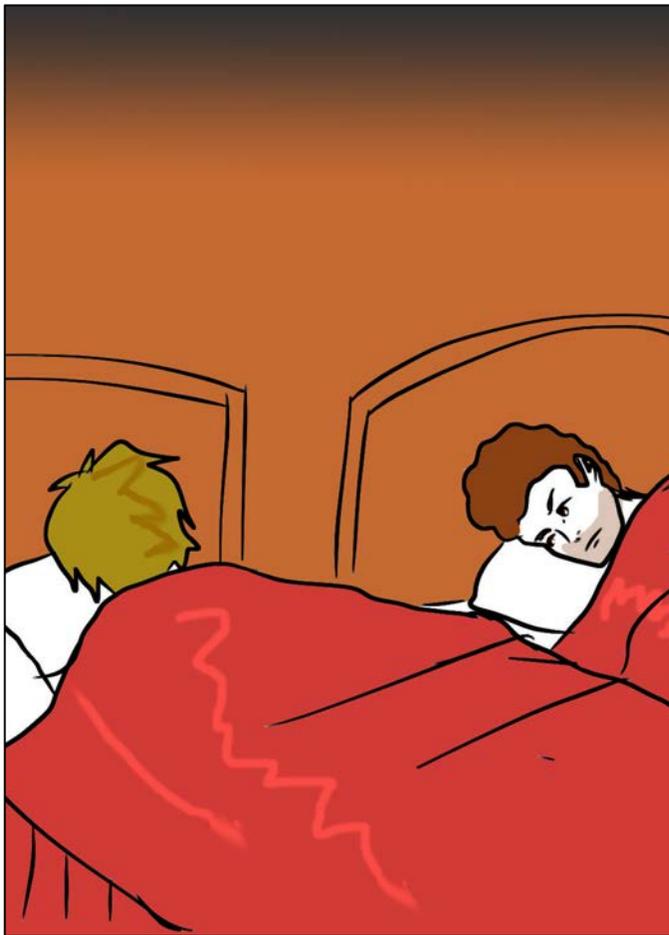
“Good night, Sarantos,” said Sergio as he faded back into the dark room.

“Good night, Sarantos. This wasn’t the trip we expected. Was it?”

“No, it wasn’t, Brad,” he said as he turned away from the shadow on the other side of the room that belonged to his long time friend and closed his eyes with a wicked smile on his face.

“Sarantos,” Brad whispered.

“Yeah. What’s that obnoxious noise?”



“That’s just the dwarf sleeping off his drinking binge. Let’s go get something to eat.”

“Right. I love hearing the birds and the ocean, but that? Not so much!”

Both guys chuckled.

“We’re getting ready to go home. It was such a short trip. I feel a little disappointed we didn’t have a more exciting adventure. I have actually gotten used to things not being easy for us.”

He sat up and yawned. “I hate it when my sleep is disrupted. I’m still tired. Well, Brad, if you think about it, the trip was rather exciting. After all, we not only found the Mary Celeste but also took the freaking boat. We are the mystery! How cool

is that??”

“I suppose you’re right, but the sad part is no one would believe us! What a jip!”

“I know. I haven’t heard you use that slang in a long while. It sounds like you’re getting back to your old self here on Earth! He patted his friend on the back. “Sorry about that, Brad. I guess it’ll have to be our little secret. Have you seen Leigh this morning?” Sarantos managed to get out of bed and pulled on his pants. “I’m starving.”

“What? You didn’t get enough of Leigh last night, dream boy? His laugh echoed through the room, although it was loud but the dwarf still snored away oblivious to anything the two friends said.

“Ha ha, very funny. You guys are a bunch of pervs listening in on my dreams. Were you listening?”

“No, but the wizard stood over you describing what he was creating. Hum, yes . . . I guess we were listening in and before you get mad, it couldn’t be helped. Wallis is a colorful storyteller. He weaves a wonderful tale that captivates your imagination.”

He felt his face heat up with embarrassment. “I suppose you’re right. I’d listen too if it’d been you!”

“What? Are you embarrassed? Look at those cheeks! Certainly not the awesome Sarantos.” He smiled and headed toward the door. “Leigh went down to breakfast with Adela. She told me to wake you up. The wizard’s already eaten and headed out with Mika. He told everyone he’d return shortly.”



Sarantos quietly shut the door as they left the room.

Brad’s eyebrow raised and he looked at him with a smirk, “Oh, I forgot something.” He gently opened the door and then slammed it shut. Brad slyly faced Sarantos and naughtily rubbed his hands together. They both fled down the hall like a couple of guilty mischievous teenagers when the screaming and cursing of the dwarf commenced from behind the closed door.

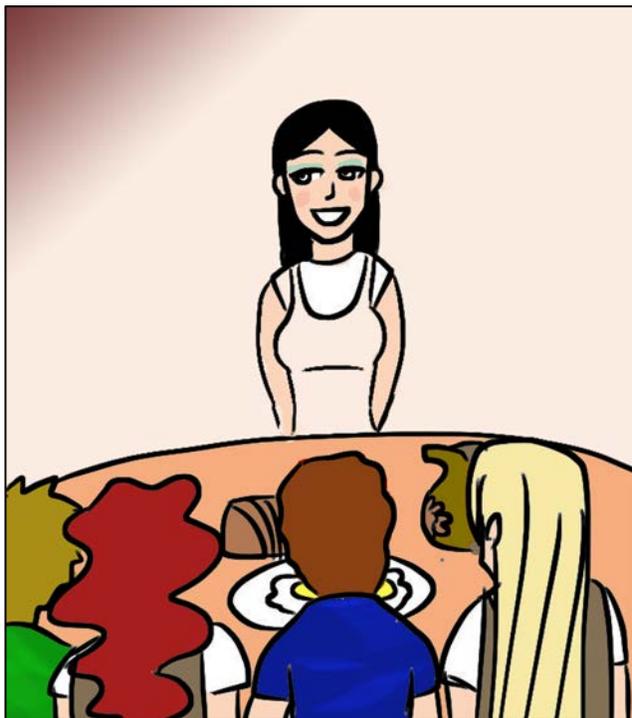
The dining area was bustling with customers. They spotted Leigh as she politely waved her hand to get their attention.

“Good morning, Leigh and Adela. You’re both looking fresh and lively today,” said Sarantos as he leaned down to kiss both ladies on their cheeks.

Brad kissed them both, pulled out a chair and sat down. Sarantos sat next to Leigh.

She smiled at him and said, “I heard we had a good time last night, sorry I couldn’t have been more accommodating master.”

Her smile was infectious. He found himself grinning from ear to ear. “Not you too my sweetheart? Et tu, Leigh? By the way, where are Sergio and Blayke?”



Before she could answer, a young woman brought a plate of warm bread and a pile of fried eggs. Then she quickly left. Another woman placed a bowl of fresh fruit in front of them and passed out plates, utensils and napkins. When the other young woman returned, she placed a teapot in the middle of the table. It was filled to the top with an exotic smelling tea. She grinned and then supplied them with fancy china cups.

“Enjoy,” she said.

Well, that’s what he thought she said anyway. He couldn’t fully understand her, but knew the typical everyday conversation in restaurants so he assumed that’s what she said.

Leigh grabbed a slice of bread and said, “Sergio and Blayke enjoyed an early breakfast with Wallis. They wanted to check out more of the Island before we left.” She took a bite of the warm bread and poured out tea for everyone.

“Oh, sure.” He mumbled as he shoved a rather large piece of bread in his mouth after coating it with a sweet tasting honey. He chewed a few times and said, “Don’t any of my friends ever sleep?”

Switch had finally joined them at breakfast while Blayke and Sergio honored them with their presence about an hour later. Now though, they all stood around in Adele’s room awaiting the wizard and Mika.

“That wizard is always running late,” grumbled the dwarf.

Adela smiled. “Switch you and Wallis always complain about the other, but you both have a fondness for each other that warms my heart. I’d love it if you’d stay on at our home. We could use more spice around the place.”

The old dwarf actually blushed. “Well, your feelings are quite different from that trouble-making wizard! He’d never agree to it, although I’d quite enjoy greeting him every morning. I’m sure he’d appreciate that for sure.” He winked at her and the twinkle in his eye was full of mischief.



Laughing heartily, Brad said, “I don’t doubt that for a minute, dwarf.”

The door opened and Wallis came into the room looking out of sorts. Mika appeared next to him. “Good morning, Mika.”

“Good morning, Sarantos.”

Leigh bent down and rubbed the furry neck of the giant black cat.

Adela quickly moved toward Wallis. “What’s wrong, my love?”

“I’m not sure. Brazon contacted me, as Mika and I were checking out

local plants. Right when I found a rather exotic plant with a purple flower, he barged in on my thoughts and I got distracted leaving the plant behind.”

“Well, what did he want that has you looking like you haven’t slept for a week?”

He looked into her eyes and then glanced over at all of them as they stood waiting for his answer. “Something’s happened in the city of Lexing. It’s been invaded by some type of renegade halflings. They’ve taken over the places of business and run most of the decent folk out of town. It seems Brazon has about thirty guests. I’ve contacted Shadow and made sure the portal was closed on his end. He said it was, but we’ll need to return immediately and do some sort of ‘PR management’ with his local spell-caster. I’ve confirmed that Clancy will refrain from using magic until he can have lessons as an apprentice.”

Blayke looked shocked, “You’ve got to be kidding us, right?”

“No, no I’m not. Never judge a book by its cover.”

“Where are we transporting to, exactly,” asked Adela?

“Well, love, if you’ll do the honors. I need to go home first and then we’ll have to drop in on Brazon before taking on the halflings.”



She smiled and the next thing he knew they were standing in front of Wallis’s fireplace and he was comfortable once more in his chair pulling on his beard. Mika was curled up by a warm, blazing fire.

Adela walked over to the table where cups were already out and she picked up a pot of fresh coffee that was sitting on the table. “Welcome home everyone. Coffee?”

Brad looked at Sarantos and they both nodded at the same time grinning from ear to ear. Leigh also took a cup and sat down. He loved

her in that chair. It was so familiar. He was glad they were home.

After hours of discussion regarding what to do about the current situation they'd finally decided on a plan.

“Well, all I can say is, it's very lucky for you wizard that this is my new home. It seems you'll be needing my expertise around here more often. Now where's my new sleeping quarters?”

The wizard's mouth fell open and he gasped. “What're you talking about dwarf? This is not your new home. Whatever gave you that idea? And, if I need your help it'll be in another life, that's for sure!”

“Now, Wallis, stay calm,” soothed Adela.

“Was this your idea, Adela? Oh for...”

“I don't know what you're belly-aching about wizard. It'll be more of a challenge for me, but I thought its time to fine tune my skills in aggravation and mothering.”

“What's that dwarf?”

“Nothing. Now precious Adela, please inform me what room I'm to be residing in?”

She and Wallis exchanged pleasantries, as she guided the dwarf to a back room.

“Wallis, I think he'll be good for all of us,” said Sarantos. He's quite skilled and of course, I'd be glad to help keep him out of your beard!”

“Oh, you would, would you Sarantos? I thank you, but I'm really quite pleased with the state of my beard. I like Switch and we have some good rows that'll keep me on my toes.” He clapped his hands together and filled the room with his warm laughter.

Leigh chuckled.

Several hours later they were all standing in Brazon's store.

“Wallis, I'm so glad you're back. I didn't mean to send you bad news, but I had no choice, it seems. Brad, good to see you.”

Brad hugged the alchemist and said, “And it's good to see you, too. Have these people been here long?”

“A few days.”



A portal opened in front of Sergio, causing him to move aside to avoid colliding with Derek.

“Greetings' friends,” he said with incredible joy, as he stepped into the room.

“Derek!” Sarantos was the first to speak his name and hug the young lad, they hadn't seen him for over a year and he was more of a man now. He appeared wiser and older.

Everyone else joined in greeting Derek, and all made him feel most welcome.

The wizard smacked him on the back and said, “What brings you back at this moment, Derek?”

“I've earned my way. I'm getting married and you're all invited”

Blayke looked at the wizard and happy expressions turned to sawdust.

Derek noticed the change immediately. He looked at the wizard. “What’s wrong, Wallis?”

Just then the door of the shop burst open and four women came in. Two of them were carrying a young girl who’d been injured. She was bleeding and appeared to be unconscious.

“What happened,” shouted Brazon as he ran forward to grab the girl from the two ladies. Brad immediately assisted him.

While they were looking at the bleeding girl, all chaos broke out inside the shop. Everything happened so fast. No one had time to think.

Mika went invisible, Sergio disappeared into the shadows and for the first time ever, Sarantos could see the dragon on the shoulder of Adela. It was bright red with yellow talons. The huge eyes were glowing and sent chills down his spine. The iridescent blue spikes on its back ran to the end of the tail and formed a sharp looking end, shaped like a dagger.



The majestic and sensuous being took flight. It moved quickly and went after one of the women who just came into the store. The other ladies were screaming and running out of the way. The dragon caught one of the women off guard and sliced her cheek. She looked to be about 75 years old. Suddenly, Mika was there biting her leg and before anyone could speak. Sergio was behind her with a large blade

that came around and sliced her throat.

She fell to the ground. As blood pooled under her body, her features began to change.