

Chapter 7

“Why”

Sarantos felt the conversation during the meeting was interesting and that all who attended wanted the vampire that held Leigh, dead and not just captured.



Blaze and Wallis were in complete control of all decisions, but listened intently to the opinion and discussions of everyone that had been invited to this meeting before they drew their own conclusions on what needed to be done.

So many questions flooded Sarantos mind, but when it became his turn to speak, all he could think of was one question to ask. Why?

Everyone looked at him dumfounded until Wallis stood up and patted him on the back and replied, “Sarantos, that’s a deep question the answers of which can only be found inside each individual’s heart. If we all knew why we do what we do and others understood why they do what they do, life would be so much easier. However, it’s that mystery that makes life truly interesting.”

“Thanks Wallis, you’re definitely right. That question produces no answers in my mind but my heart bleeds for her. Each breath I take, I take for her. It belongs to her because my love owes her at least that much. I feel so helpless here, right now.” He lowered his head into his hands and felt the heat of tears as they warmed his palms.

“I understand Sarantos and we’ll save her if it’s the last thing we do, my friend. You have my word.”

Wallis sat back down and the conversation continued until dinner was ready to be served. They had enjoyed several small breaks to stretch, relax their minds and walk about the kingdom during the course of the long day.

King Blaze stood up and announced, “We’ll move to the dining hall for dinner and finish our conversation back here immediately afterwards. Enjoy your meal and be at peace my brothers and sisters.”

Everyone appeared famished as they hurried to the hall.

After dinner Sarantos walked slowly back into the huge study. He realized he could live in Ethel someday. He enjoyed how the people rejoiced in each moment. They enjoyed each other. They also enjoyed every moment and cherished it as if it were the last moment of their lives.



The dinners were magical and full of excellent conversation. Everyone was interested in the talents that belonged to each individual. It was wonderfully personal. The exchange of ideas, information and talents was forthcoming from all. Sarantos was fascinating to most of the others there. In fact, he was invited to bring his guitar to dinner and join in with other musicians to create a sound that filled the room in celebration. To enjoy one song that combined the uniqueness of so many voices was creatively stimulating to Sarantos and to all present there. There was a sense of magic in the air.

Sarantos had realized, in that moment, that it wasn't about spreading his music to so many people, but to revel in those that genuinely appreciated what he had to

offer musically. He learned that delighting in each individual's voice and accepting their unusual differences allowed him the privilege to hear many hearts all at once. His soul felt whole. He felt complete. He was fulfilled. He was at peace!

"Sarantos, it looks like the dwarfs and several different shifty characters will be joining the meeting," voiced Derek abruptly.

The comment of his friend brought him back to their purpose for being there. "I wonder what the final decision will be?" Sarantos moved to sit back where he had initially been when they'd first assembled.

All in the room waited in silence for the King and Salar to enter.

The King entered the room with Salar and Wallis, after about twenty minutes of everyone chatting quietly and patiently waiting.

Even though the circumstances were not what Sarantos would have liked them to be, the gathering of such unique and fascinating people had his undivided attention. He felt honored to be in attendance of such company.

Everyone listened intently as King Blaze said in a firm and distinct voice, "Wallis and I have consulted with Salar and we've made our decision on how we're going to proceed." He nodded toward Wallis.

The old wizard bowed and stood to face all in attendance. He cleared his throat and proceeded, "Last night ten guardians left Alazuline to seek information about where the she-devil came from and they traveled in groups of two. We believe now that the vampires are dwindling in power and control. Since their leader was removed from Ethel, more citizens will be willing to speak up and offer information about her and the renegades. Sometimes fear prevents those who want to help us from speaking their minds, keeping them tight-lipped." Wallis paused to take a long draught of lager.



Sarantos had been listening, but watched Salar closely to see if his facial features changed. He remembered Mika had told him that being a changeling was part of ‘The Sixties’ heritage, but he still wondered what he’d seen.

He shifted his gaze toward the big cat who was laid out in front of the fire as she seemingly rested, but he knew she heard and saw everything that went on. He missed her. Since their journey began, she was at the wizard’s side and he knew they shared secrets no one else was privy too. Wallis trusted her. And Mika would do

anything for Wallis.

Sarantos looked back at Wallis when he began speaking again, “We’re confident information will be soon forthcoming. The lair of the renegades is now known to us. We’ll attack them at this supposed place of security. Prepare yourselves tonight. We leave in the morning. Everyone in this meeting will be involved in the upcoming battle in some form or other except the King and Salar. They will remain here preparing for our return because when we do return, the place of origin of this vampire should then be known to us. A small select group will then leave to go to her homeland to further investigate.”

The King stood as Wallis bowed respectfully, then sat back down. King Blaze raised his voice in proudness and each name he spoke was intoned with honor, as he looked to each person mentioned and paused allowing everyone in the room to bow their heads in their direction showing favor and respect to each member. “That group will include: Wallis, . . . Mika, . . . Blayke, . . . Sarantos, . . . Derek, . . . Adela, . . . the dwarf Switch, . . . the guardian Deanna, . . . and her ward, Sandwort.”

Sarantos looked at Derek who was beaming like a bright red light bulb. There was no doubt he was elated that Deanna would be joining them on this adventure.

The King and Salar quietly left the meeting. That's when the conversation really started buzzing around the room. Tea and cakes were brought in as everyone walked about discussing the coming events.

Derek approached Sarantos. "Well, my good friend, I know why those men at the table are so shifty looking. They're the watchdogs of the royal family. I'll have to earn the good favor of Sandwort," he laughed heartily smacking Sarantos on the back.

"It seems your new best friend will be the one dripping with intrigue and shifty eyes," Sarantos laughed and lifted his drink to Derek as they clanked their mugs in a merry toast.



Deanna moved to join them, while Sandwort stood quietly by her side. "Well my fellow adventurers, one thing you should understand about my race is that we hear extremely well." With that comment she threw Derek a cute little grin. As her brow raised, she twisted her mouth into what could only be referred to as a smooch and seductively winked. She put her arm inside Sandwort's and walked over to Wallis without a glance back at the two of them, who now stood quietly by with embarrassed expressions.

Mika's voice echoed in his head. "Very funny Sarantos. It seems you're still learning about our worlds."

"Thanks for letting me know in advance Mika."

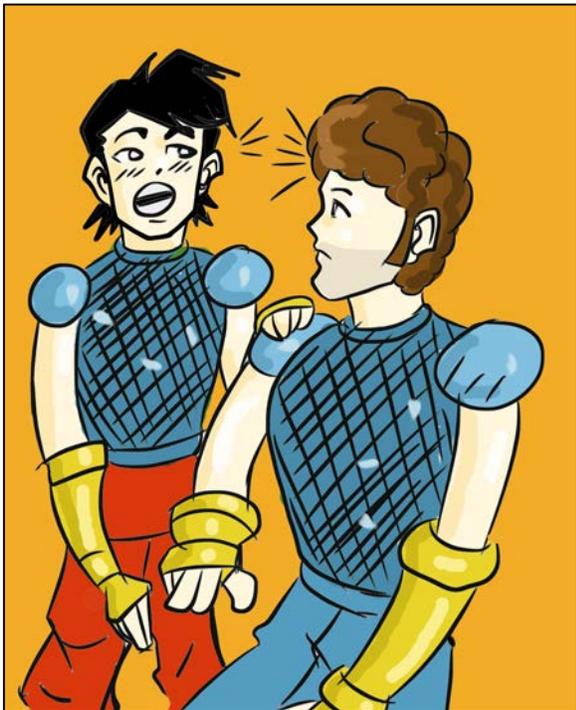
“I should have but it was much more enjoyable to watch and see what mischief the two of you got into.”

“I miss you and your wonderful sarcasm. Don’t ask me why but I do.”

“I’ll try to indulge you with more of my delightful sense of humor on our next journey, my friend. I wouldn’t want to disappoint you. Things have just been too serious of late.”

“Yes, I know. I miss Leigh, Mika. She’d cast a spell on me with her gentle eyes and made me believe in love, again.”

“I understand, Sarantos. I miss her as well. Wallis too has heartache that he cannot share and he knows your pain. He knows what you’re feeling. He will do what it takes to get her back to all of us. Trust me and believe this to be true.”



Derek was shouting at him, “Sarantos, can’t you hear me?”

“Oh, sorry. I was daydreaming. What were you saying?”

“I said, I feel a little awkward now that she knows how I feel about her.”

Sarantos grinned, “I wouldn’t worry about that. You might want to consider the feelings of her ward though. I thought he seemed a little hurt. Didn’t you think he was a little hurt? He had a pout about him.”

“Oh, my friend you make me laugh when you tease me that way,” Derek chuckled. Then his face grew serious and he said rather nervously, “Do you think he was hurt? Should I worry?”

“Oh, yes, I do,” Sarantos replied.

A soft purr filled his head, “Shame on you.”

Sarantos was restless as he tossed and turned in his sleep. His dreams were filled with vampires and demons.

A voluptuous female vampire with penetrating eyes grabbed him and kissed him passionately. He wanted her to take him, to make him one of them. He heard himself beg for her to bite his neck and feed on him. She licked his mouth and ran her tongue all the way down his neck and gently started sinking her teeth into his flesh. He was almost driven mad by the pleasure he found in the seductive moment. It was a fantasy he longed for with the depths of his soul. Was it real? Was it a dream? It had to be real! He could now feel her teeth. He grabbed her. As he pulled her closer, he briefly opened his eyes and saw Leigh peering out from behind a wall. She was chained, bleeding and weeping. A very tall dark man approached her and lifted her to his mouth. His eyes smiled at Sarantos as his fangs sank into Leigh’s delicate flesh. Sarantos started screaming, “No, my heart was meant for you, you and only you!”

“Sarantos, wake up. Wake up.”

He opened his hazy eyes and found Derek standing over him. His body was soaked in unholy perspiration.

“What happened to you? You were screaming and I awoke . . . Sarantos, your neck is bleeding.”

“What?”

He lifted his hand to his neck and felt two raised marks as his fingers slowly played in his own blood trying to comprehend what had just happened.

Derek shouted, “We need Wallis.”

The door burst open and a frantic Mika and a concerned Wallis came running into the room.

Sarantos felt dizzy just before he passed out.

Sarantos awoke to find an attractive female guardian cleaning his neck with sweet-smelling, cool and soothing ointment. He kept trying to pull her toward his mouth.

His head was foggy, but he could still understand what Wallis was saying to someone about him, “This is very serious. We must notify the King. We’ve had an intruder and it shouldn’t have been possible. Go now and warn the King. We’re lucky the cat knew. They might have dragged him off if not for Mika.”

Sarantos moaned as the cat tried to enter his mind and find out who had done this. He felt her, but would not let her in. He wanted the vampire. He wanted the vampire so badly!

Mika spoke so those in the room could hear, “Wallis, we’re in trouble. He’s closed to us and wants the vampire to finish taking him to the dark side.”

Sarantos barely heard Wallis raise his voice in agitation, “How could this have happened?”

The morning light filtered through the glass windows and it hurt his fatigued eyes.

Leigh was standing over him feeding him a delicate tasting soup that made his tongue tingle. He smiled and grabbed her face between his hands and pulled her down to his waiting and eager mouth spilling the soup everywhere. He gently bit her lips and started to kiss her neck when his hands were suddenly forced to his sides and he could no longer move.



He moaned and fell into a dreamy state where loud music could be heard in the background and the beautiful voluptuous vampire was calling his name. He could feel her breath against his mouth. She tasted delicately luscious. His heart flew to her begging and crying for her to make him hers. There was no logical reason he should feel this way except somewhere in the back of his foggy mind, he genuinely believed he belonged to this sensual woman.

Something strange happened to his body as he floated through space and stood next to this gorgeous vampire. He could barely stand, but she held him up draining his blood. He wanted her and didn't care. He gave himself over to her and that was all she needed, as the blood draining continued. She allowed him to suck on her neck and his teeth grew in sensitivity until her taste delivered him a high he'd never experienced before. His eyes ached and his mouth watered. He craved for more.

He was almost there, almost fully alive when this beautiful creature screamed out in agony.

She was ripped from his mouth and her blood was going everywhere. Sarantos couldn't bear it . . . her taste was haunting but insatiable. His scream threatened to puncture his own eardrums, but he couldn't stop.

He thought he saw Blayke and Wallis fighting his vision. *Wallis always stopped him from having what he wanted.* Mika moved around some blurry figures and appeared to be slightly injured. His poor feline friend always seemed to get hurt. He wanted to help her, but his screaming continued until his voice had gone hoarse.

Sarantos reached out his hand to Derek who stood out in front of him with his bow ready to protect them both. The young man was too busy to notice. A shadow of a humanoid approached, but suddenly it turned into a bat and flew at Derek. He pulled a knife and deftly impaled the flying creature.

Everything was moving in slow motion and Sarantos couldn't clear his foggy vision no matter how hard he tried. His head kept spinning and he had trouble focusing on the moving apparitions. Everything was happening too fast. His mouth would open, but no words would come out and it seemed as if his friends were ignoring him.

Derek then drew a sword and went to attack the back of a figure standing in front of a slender female with long flowing hair. Sarantos felt he should do something.

He wasn't sure if he was standing or on his knees, but when he looked around he saw the beautiful vampire fighting for her life. Sarantos tried to crawl, or walk to her. He wasn't sure if he was even moving until he actually made it to her side.

They had left her to die. She was fading from his view, but she lifted her hands and weakly pulled his neck to her mouth. He was glad their bonding could continue and he moaned slightly. He would have let her take his life, but his own urgency for her overcame him as he smiled seductively and took her face between his hands before feeding himself all the pleasures she could physically offer him. He bit down and tasted the warmth of her life. He was in ecstasy until something hit him in the back of the head and he lost consciousness.

It was dark and Sarantos thought he would never see Leigh again. He couldn't bare this heartache anymore and wanted it to stay away. He was too scared to feel the pain so he moved through the darkest corridors of his own mind and hid from the soft gentle hands that encouraged him to wake up and live again.

He walked around the house he lived in with Wallis. It was empty. His friends were gone, but his memories were sinfully alive.

Brad made jokes and cooked pizza. Leigh sang with Sarantos, while he gently played his guitar. She strolled around the room and Mika followed her enjoying the sound of the music. Wallis laughed as Leigh pulled him up out of his chair to join her in a dance. She was radiant and he moved gracefully. Leigh prompted Wallis to sing and his voice lifted with hers and Sarantos with a unique magical enchantment all its own.



The door flew open and the fresh smell of a winter's snowfall came in with Blayke and Muriele. They grinned and brushed the white fluff from their clothing and sat the Christmas tree inside the specially made clay holder, already waiting in front of the large shuttered window.

Brad and Sarantos had introduced them to Christmas and their new friends loved the whole idea. They'd made decorations and strung popcorn. Sarantos wrote a new Christmas song with help from Leigh. Everyone quickly learned it and they all sang it while decorating the tree drinking smooth hot chocolate. When they were all done, Wallis told everyone to stand back

and close their eyes.

He did a little mumble jumble and said with childlike enthusiasm, "You can open your eyes now!"

They did and the wows would not stop as they looked upon a twinkling magically lit tree. A multi-faceted rainbow of colors were moving in perfect synchronicity to the beat of the new song Sarantos and Leigh had written. He was the best wizard ever! They all gathered around Wallis and gave him pats on the back and the girls applauded his supernatural skill.

Wallis strutted around like a peacock and foolishly shouted to Brad, “Bring on the pizza.”

It was Christmas Eve and the wonderful presents they shared were thoughtful and came from the heart, but the most valued gift of all was the time they shared and that magical box of memories that could be opened time after time, again and again, and never get broken or lost...

His memories were starting to fade. Someone out of the box was calling his name. He didn't want to answer. He looked at the face of Leigh, smiling and tried to hold her, but that voice wouldn't let up. *No, leave me alone.*

His voice was raspy, “Leave me alone.”

“I will not,” the old wizard firmly stated. “It's about time you came back to the land of the living, after all.”



Sarantos tried to open his eyes, but they seemed plastered shut. His neck and throat hurt like they'd been burnt with a torch. In fact, his whole body ached all over. He tried to wiggle his toes and although they responded, that simple movement created a shooting pain that reached his ankles.

“Where am I?”

“You're in your bed in the castle, Alazuline.”

“Oh, I thought I'd died and you followed me here just to haunt me,” he said as he

managed a small chuckle that barely escaped his lips.

“Be careful what you share with this old wizard, Sarantos. I just might do that someday but today is not that day. You are very much alive, thanks to a perseverant cat, a skilled alchemist, and a longtime devoted friend.”

“Thanks, Mika.”

“You’re welcome my friend. We have a potion to bring Leigh back from the dark side, but it was made especially for her race. These potions are hard to come by and the ingredients are very rare. I traveled back home to speak with Brazon and Brad. They searched and located all the ingredients that were needed for your potion. Then Brad and I made the journeys needed to locate and return with those items as promptly as we could. The two of them went to work immediately on the potion. It was very time consuming and needed to be put together with precision. Cautious handling was imperative. I was worried we would be too late.”

Sarantos finally pulled his eyes open. The light hurt a lot and his head pounded.

The wizard frowned before speaking in a soft whisper, “Muriele’s husband is elfin and Brazon has yet to find a cure to bring him back from the dark. He hopes one day to discover that miracle.”

Sarantos closed his eyes and said, “Right. I hope he does.”

He thought of Brad and hoped he would find a true love that would be only for him. He too deserved to be happy. His best friend was one of a kind.

“It’ll take about a week before you’re able to travel. We’ve found the location of the vampire’s home. We’ll talk about that later.”

“Wallis, how did they get to me? It wasn’t a dream then? I thought I saw you and the others fighting off bats and shadows. I drank the blood of a vampire and I enjoyed it. Will I be okay?”

“Yes, my friend, but you were in reality converting into an undead. While you slept, a vampire named Selena seduced you. Mika had awakened me and we ran to save you, otherwise she might have taken you back to her lair. Derek must have disturbed her as well. She was a shadow walker. I thought their kind was extinct. Obviously, my limited knowledge is only from the worlds I’ve been to. She was able to pull you to her lair through the shadow world and continue her seduction there effortlessly. We saw you though and that’s how I was able to understand how to defeat her during our battle. Had she waited, we might have never figured out how she got to you or how to save you.”

“What an experience and it’s not one I would want to repeat, except maybe with Leigh.”

“You shouldn’t think that way Sarantos. It makes you vulnerable to their attack and yes, someone could still come after you. Once you’ve been in the dark world it’s easier to be seduced and you’re easier to take again. Be wary.”

“Okay.”

“We now have spells around the castle to prevent any more interaction of that sort, and we don’t anticipate any more disruptions. We cleaned up the mess so to speak.”



“I still feel tired, but I suppose I should get up and try to move about.”

Blayke moved forward. Sarantos hadn’t noticed him until this instant. He smiled weakly up at the big guy. He felt utterly frail, as Blayke grabbed his arms and hauled him to his feet. He’d lost weight and when he stood his boxers slipped to the floor. Blayke burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny? It’s not that ugly,” Sarantos said sheepishly.

He thought he heard Mika giggle and Wallis turned away with his head down. That could only mean one thing.

“Good grief, how long was I out of it?”

“About two weeks,” Wallis said behind a muffled voice.

“Looks like I need food. Okay, Blayke, help me get some clothes on and could you assist me to the kitchen?”

His friend nodded. Well, he was glad he could entertain them. After all, they’d done a lot for him and it was good to hear them laugh although it was at his expense.

It was early evening by the time Sarantos showered and arrived for dinner. He had to keep stopping and take breaks to regain his balance and strength before he could move on. Blayke was patient with him and never complained.

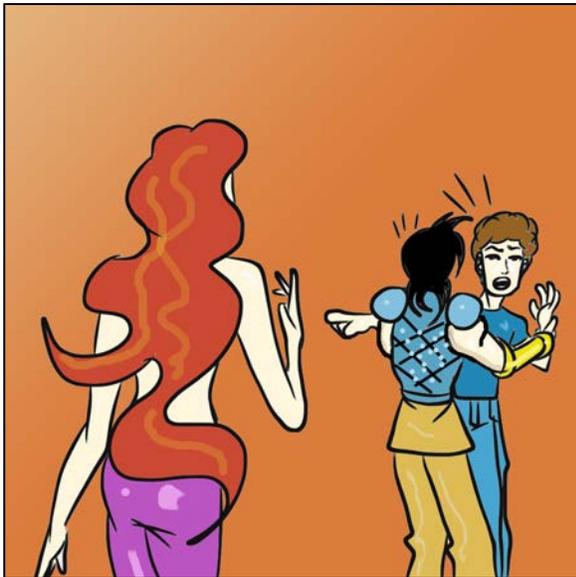
The kitchen crew already knew to expect him and food was being hauled in by four different people and placed on the table. Derek came in with Deanna and both of them gave him a warm hug. He liked that, because he didn’t want to feel alone and he was glad his fear of being left behind was just a silly fear. His friends cared too much about him and knew how important this mission was for his heart, for her, for the woman he would die for. He would do anything for Leigh. His heart was meant for her.

They both pulled up a chair and joined him and Blayke for one of the best meals of his entire life.

The sun was setting and tinting the white china with shades of blue. He would never get tired of watching them move about the room. Derek had been smiling from ear to ear during the whole meal and Sarantos loved to see this young man so

happy. It was the Derek he used to know, before his mother and sister were murdered, and before he had to kill.

Wallis joined them with Adela on his arm and their eyes sparkled in - could it be, love? This was interesting but before he could give it any more thought, a woman came into the room behind them.



She walked as though she were dancing on air and her long red hair swayed as blonde highlights ran through it like sparkling water. Her lips were a sultry luscious red. When her face turned his way, her brown eyes were lit with golden sundrops. He wanted her for his own. She was voluptuous and breathtaking. She had immediately cast a spell on him, but something was wrong . . . very wrong . . .

He knew her . . . He stood up and gasped. He turned to run, but was too weak and fell over his chair hitting the floor with a loud thud.

He couldn't speak. As Blayke stood him up on his feet, he quivered in fear.

His hand pointed at the woman. He knew her.

Suddenly, he was able to produce a weak whimper, "It's her . . . my seducer, my vampire."