

*Chapter 10*  
*“A Halloween Song”*



A beautiful woman stood at the top of the bridge. Her hair was braided and hung to her waist. She wore a soft flowing gown that blended in with the color of the trees. She smiled and the woodland immediately lit up around her creating a sheen on her

porcelain skin that made her look like an angel, but what really caught his attention was her size. She was at least twelve feet tall.

The wizard reached her at once running like a giddy child to her. She easily picked him up and squeezed him like he was a ragdoll.

“Moonflower.” The wizard’s voice rose with emotion, as he hugged her tightly.

Sarantos wasn’t sure if he would ever let her go. The dwarf looked at him and barely got the words out of his mouth without choking back tears, “Sarantos, is that who I think it is?”

“Yes, dwarf, yes, it is,” the wizard announced. “Meet Mandrake’s wife, Moonflower.”

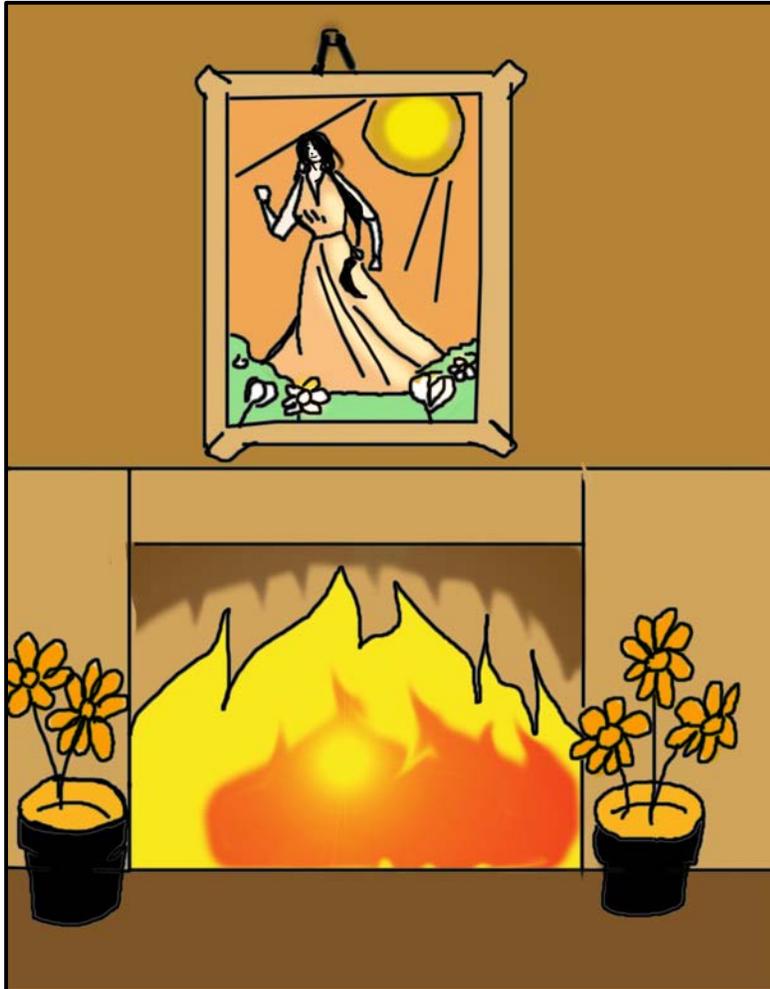
Everyone stood there with tears in their eyes and waited for the wizard and Moonflower to finish their long overdue hellos.

After a short time, she stood him on the ground and smiled ever so politely.

“How’d you ever find me? And more importantly, why’d the forest let you in? I’ve kept track of my time here and for a while I tried to find a way out, but eventually I gave up. Actually forget that, here come inside and sit. We shall talk around the table with food and drink. You must be famished!” She winked kindly then moved past everyone opening the large door to her home and beckoning for them to enter.

\*\*\*

The inside was neatly decorated, but everywhere Sarantos looked he saw orange and black. The colors reminded him of Halloween.



Large orange flowers stood in a black vase to either side of a stone fireplace with a black marble mantel. A large painting of herself framed in black ebony wood hung carefully above it. She was running through fields of white wildflowers as her long black hair playfully swayed in the breeze. She wore an orange dress that clung to her shapely body and was clearly painted with care. The sunset behind her had ripples of orange that cast shadows of orange on the white flowers. It was simply magnificent.

“Who painted that picture of you, Moonflower?”

She was busy putting orange plates on a darkly stained table, but turned to look his way regardless.

The wizard jumped in and said, “Oh, forgive me, Moonflower, I never properly introduced you to everyone. You know Mika, Aurora and the elves, but this is Bear and his little bear, Blayke, Leigh, Switch, and the man with all the questions of course is Sarantos.”

“I’m very pleased to meet all of you.” She smiled gently at those she knew and added, “I’ll give you hugs and proper greetings when you’ve had some nourishment in you. The woods can drain you. I’m still surprised you had no troubles getting in here. I haven’t had a single visitor since I’ve been a solo resident of Woodworm Woods and now all of a sudden I have more than enough visitors even for a party!”

Sarantos was a little upset his question never got answered, but looking at the size of the table and plates he wondered how they were going to eat. He glanced at the wizard who didn’t appear to have any qualms about their current situation.

Moonflower continued to place ridiculously smelling food on the table while singing gleefully. The aroma was intoxicating. The mugs were orange and too large for any of them to use. The pitcher was polished glass and filled with an interesting looking drink, but too heavy for them to lift. The utensils, well it was just wrong to expect anything of that size to fit into their mouths. He was hungry, though. The loaf of bread would be enough to indulge the entire group without any other food needed. It was then that he noticed the large window. There were all sorts of beautiful herbs that hung from it, drying out nicely.

How was it that this woman whose body was carried to the Isle of Girth was so real here? Did she haunt these woods? Was she alive?

The wizard interrupted his train of thought when he started incanting. His hands moved so gracefully and the words flowed freely and without effort.

“There, Sarantos, will that suit you now?”

He knew instantly what the cat was talking about because the table and all of its content had now been reduced in size to accommodate the small guests. Everyone moved towards the table to enjoy the newly sized meal.

Moonflower pulled over a black wooden rocking chair and a table for her own food to be placed upon and sat down close to them. She sipped on her drink and began her story. The gleam in her eye was obvious.

“Wizard, it all began when I was born. My name Moonflower was given to me by a group of witches that my dear mother raised with love and happiness. The three triplets were orphaned when they were four years old. My mother knew they were from your clan, The Sixties, so she took them in and raised them as her own. My father adored them and their love and devotion to each other was both joyful and inspiring. Thirty years later when I was born, the girls named me and blessed me, each placing a magical gift upon my life. The first one, blessed me with a joyful voice, the second one with a gift of understanding, and the third one blessed me with beauty. However, the best gift I received was when all three of them blessed me with eternal life, both in name and body.”

She stood up and grabbed a handful of herbs and threw it on her food, then returned to her chair and continued her story.

“When Mandrake held me when I was dying, his pain tore at my heart and I wept. The tears created the flower - the Moonflower you call Pleurer. The flower was what brought me back here to my eternal home. The woods I grew up in provided all the love I could ever hope for but the flower keeps me bound here. If it were removed or if I were to leave here, I would die. That’s the way this magic works unfortunately. So I was given some help when I first got here by the woodland creatures to build my home and now we take care of each other. I’ve become their guardian and they mine. Please tell me now, how is Mandrake, Wallis?”



“He pines on the Isle of Girth for you, my dearest Moonflower. We sought your flower to return to him, because after your death he came back to find it but was unsuccessful. We needed it to make a deal to use a magical gem that will return Sergio to his rightful state.”

She shook her head slowly and said, “Yes, he must be angry with humans and I could see you’d have to make a deal with him. He was always a stubborn man!” Her

laugh rang inside the house and caused all of those listening to join in laughter.

“I love him. I still miss him. You must find him and bring him to me. Please Wallis!”

“How could we convince him to follow us, Moonflower? He’s too big to move. I don’t think I could make him do anything he doesn’t want to do.”

“Wizard, I will give you a lock of my hair and a message to him in a bottle. He’ll understand, I’m sure of it.”

“Sure, we can do that. We’ll be some time though. We would normally just appear on the isle by magic, but the isle blocks us from locating it at precisely the right moment. We could end up in the ocean. We heard there is a giant that still lives on the land of the humans that ferries over other giants in need of Mandrake’s healing

services. We'll seek him out and hope that he'll allow us passage. It would be much quicker that way."

"I see. What's his name? Do you know?"

"Yes. Stoneburl."

She smiled. "Yes, I'll give you a message for him as well. I knew him his whole life. That, my friend is a story for another time."

A loud noise caused all of them to jump up nervously, suddenly ready for combat.

"Relax everyone, it's just my friends from the woods that've come to join our meeting."

The door blew open and suddenly there were black cats and ghosts everywhere. It was eerie.

This place was so mystical and surreal, Sarantos thought it could inspire a cool Halloween song. He'd have to put the lyrics together at another time though, since they were busy right now, but the thought made him smirk.



The ghosts sat in chairs and stood next to their table. The cats brushed along the legs of everyone in the room, including the little bear and Mika. They were checking them all out. They had no fear whatsoever.

“Forgive them, they haven’t seen outsiders ever in my home. Some of the ghosts have died in these woods when they came in with bad intentions but they are nowadays bound to serve and protect. Others, as you can see are giants that died in the battle protecting our home, and of course they still protect it.

The black cats are a group of felines that live in the woods that some say are old dead witches but no matter what they are, they are here for us.”

Blayke picked up one of the cats and laid it on his lap. He then watched it climb skillfully from his lap to his neck, then allowed it to rest on his shoulder.

Seeing the big strong warrior, who seldom showed any emotion but was now smiling from a simple black cat, was very heartwarming.

Aurora was looking at Blayke with a hint of tenderness and love. Sarantos always hoped they’d get together some day. They deserved a life together. They deserved a life of love.

Sergio, Muriele and Mika were engaged in honest conversation with Wallis and Moonflower. They were laughing. They appeared to be catching up on lost years.

The dwarf was eating and drinking looking quite pleased with how this day had turned out for him. Bear had eaten little and moved to a big rug by the fire where he sat brushing his small bear. The druid was a quiet man surely shrouded in dark mystery.

Sarantos turned and caught Leigh smiling at him. Her eyes gently held his while she reached over and clutched his hand.



“You know what Leigh? Do you remember when we talked about Halloween in my world?” She nodded. “Well, this is pretty darn close to a Halloween party. When I was a kid, we used to have the coolest Halloween parties. There was so much shaving cream and egging that pretty much everyone ended up needing to shower and change clothes when the party was done. Those were some of the best nights of my life. They’re some of my fondest memories from high school!”

Her face lit up. She listened intently as he reminisced out loud. His heart melted. How lucky he was to have someone who paid so much attention to him. He knew she valued his words. No one else ever listened to him like she did. He loved her so much! She was clearly happy for him. She was happy when he was happy.

“I think I would’ve loved your earthly world and Halloween parties, Sarantos.”

“Maybe, some day we could travel there and experience it together. I wouldn’t ever want to go back there without you, my love.”

That made him think again about Sergio and Muriele. It wouldn’t be a good place for the two of them to visit, at least not at Halloween time with vampires flossing and sharpening their fangs. Even he looked at the costumed part of it from a different angle now. Vampires in this world meant something entirely different. They were real and it wasn’t fun and it certainly wasn’t a game.

He shivered remembering some of his close encounters with the female vampires of this world. They really were a frightful delight meant to thrill and excite but they could also kill you or enslave you forever. He couldn’t deny the excitement end of it, nor the frightful part of becoming a vampire but it was a totally different perspective in his world for sure. His thoughts were rudely interrupted by Wallis.

“Well, friends let’s get some rest and tomorrow our journey will be less dangerous than we’d previously thought. Moonflower has decided to guide us to the border of the woods where the town of Bane lies quietly on the seashore. From there we’ll seek out the giant, Stoneburl.”

The cats were curled up by the fire and most of the ghosts just wandered around the room, chatting and listening in on a conversation of their choice. One ghost was staring at him from across the table. It was a huge giant with a scar on its cheek and generous gentle eyes. The clothes that hung from its ghostly figure were torn and shredded with dark blotches that appeared to be blood stains.

“Hello, can I help you?”

“Your name is Sarantos, my name is Stewart. It’s nice to meet you. I couldn’t help but overhear you talking about Halloween in your world. What is that, this party called Halloween?”

“Oh, I see what you mean, Stewart. You would be curious about that party I guess. It did sound like fun I take it? Well, it’s a time to celebrate superstitions, of a sort. Humans dress in costumes and throw parties. It’s a lot of fun.”

“What type of costumes?”

“Well, you’d fit right in, as a ghost! Some dress like werewolves, mummies and witches. Ghouls and bats often wander around, even the food is prepared to be a little scary looking. It’s all make believe though as that world doesn’t really have ghosts or goblins.”

“Interesting. I think I would enjoy this Halloween party. Maybe, we could have one here sometime.”



“I’d love to help with it, maybe when I get back.”

“Thanks, Sarantos.”

“Oh, no problem my new friend, I’d enjoy helping and I could even come up with a Halloween song for the party.”

Leigh joined the conversation. “Oh, great idea. I want to help too!”

“Oh, Leigh, that’d be great fun.”

Moonflower’s soft voice echoed around the large room. “Everyone can sleep where they want tonight. Wallis can use his magic to reduce what you need down to a smaller size. I have many guest rooms for my forest friends so please make yourselves at home. It’s a short walk to the sea and on a good day the ocean scent consumes my home. Sometimes I walk down there and just peer out to see the changes going on in the world.”

Everyone said thanks to Moonflower for being such a great host. Her face beamed with love and joy. She was so happy and content tonight.

\*\*\*

The flavor of the sea wafted in through the open window and softly brought him and Leigh out of a deep sleep.

He inhaled. “I love the smell. What do you think Leigh?”

She moaned and snuggled close to him. Yes, I love it. I love anything you love my love,” she giggled while spooning him.

He pulled her close and played with her silky hair. This trip turned out to be an unthinkable experience. Having Leigh with him was the absolute best thing that could have happened. The only sad part was Abby. She would have enjoyed this place.

The room they’d chosen was full of newly picked pumpkins sitting around the room. The quilt was black and sateen, as were the sheets. This was a cabin so the walls

were solid wood logs, but had a deep hint of orange stain easily visible through the grain. He wondered why she'd chosen these colors to decorate her home?

He watched Leigh get out of bed and walk to the grandiose open orange window. Her finely shaped body was more muscular than he'd remembered. Her hair was loose and conveniently hung to her waist; he enjoyed the tips of it as they lightly moved across her body.

She tossed her head his way and chuckled. She was gorgeous in the fresh morning sun. Her dark hair shone as the daybreak crashed against her supple skin scattering the rays helplessly. She stopped in front of the window and twirled towards him

beckoning him to join her to enjoy a view that was not to be missed.



At first he just stared at her. A goddesses' beauty without question. Her face was pure and glowed like morning dew on a rose. Her breasts were full of life and begged to be touched. She looked innocent and youthful, but held an allure of aged wisdom and womanhood. She had it all.

“Are you coming?”

“I’d like to, but it’s very hard with you all the way over there.” He grinned but didn’t move on purpose.

“You’re naughty. Come here and join me. Take in the artistry of these woods. A colorful breath will invigorate your soul. Trust me, we’ll have plenty of time to get back to bed for an encore...if you’re in the mood in a few minutes.”

“Okay, if I must,” he groaned.

“You’re quite the man, aren’t you, Sarantos?”

He rolled out of bed. “Well, I was admiring your impressive beauty, if you don’t mind me confessing to you the truth. It was just the kind of beauty I was in the mood for as I opened my sleepy eyes but I guess mother nature and the natural wonder of the world will have to do for now. Actually, on second thought...”

He moved over to her by the window and mischievously put his hands on her face caressing her forehead and temples while brushing her hair back away from her lips, kissing them ever so softly. The gentle breeze peeking thru the open window tried to cool them off but they barely noticed it was even there anymore...

\*\*\*

Hours later they entered the dining area. It was already busy. The ghosts were still roaming about, but obviously had allowed everyone their privacy. They were respectful.

The table was large again and Moonflower was busy preparing breakfast for everyone.

“Hello to all.” Sarantos was in a great mood.

“Good morning.” Leigh’s gentle words echoed momentarily then faded away.

“Well, good morning to both of you.”

Wallis was obviously in a marvelous mood now that he found Moonflower alive. The loss of Abby had hurt him so bad that this newfound life was good for his soul. It healed him a bit.

\*\*\*

After they’d eaten, Moonflower had given Wallis the gifts to give her husband, packed them some food and now they were following a cute stone path down to the waterfront.

It was a sunny day with plentiful clouds that moved quickly by. It was interesting that only with Moonflower beside them did the woods turn into a thing of pure beauty. There was no fear anymore. There were no shadows. Above, they could see the overjoyed sky in all its glory erupting in all directions.

“I laid this path myself. It took me several years, but it was worth it. Stone beneath the foot when one is walking for miles is just what any giant loves. Although, we also enjoy occasionally going barefoot on our walks, as well. Touching the earth with our soul, so to speak.”

Sarantos used this time to ask about her home. “Moonflower, if you don’t mind me asking, what made you choose the colors of black and orange in decorating your home?”



Her belly laugh rippled through the woods. “My wonderful husband had planted us a garden one year of many different things, but the only thing that came out of it was things with an orange or black color. Pumpkins, squash and a flower we eat called darkhedge. You must have noticed them around here. I’ve planted them everywhere. Oh, and they were by the fireplace, as well. It reminds me of our home and

our times together filled with never-ending happiness. Even when things didn’t go quite right, everything still always worked out. I suppose I was hoping the same would happen here; that in time we would find each other and it would all work out. We had so much food that year, even if it was only orange and black.”

The story brought forth many smiles from the entire party.

“We’re here, already.”

They could see a light peeking through the dark woods. They could hear the sounds of waves crashing into the sea and people talking at the wharf.

“I leave you here to continue on your journey and wish you many blessings and safety, my friends.”

They all said their goodbyes, but Sarantos had one more question.

“Moonflower, one more question, if you don’t mind?”

“Good grief, Sarantos.” The wizard was back to his grumpy self.

“I don’t mind, Wallis. Ask away Sarantos.”

“Who painted that picture of you above the fireplace?”

“My husband, Mandrake. The year of our orange and black gardening!”

And with that, she took off up the path with the cats and ghosts flying in and out of the woods but following closely behind her.

\*\*\*

He missed her already. He really liked Moonflower. Her spirit was light and fun. He thought of her smile as they faced the docks and followed the wizard down the hilltop

to the sea, but as they walked he looked behind him and saw the woods were closed back up again, dark and fearful.

No one noticed where they came from. He imagined the wizard had laid a spell of concealment on them. After all, no one returns from Woodworm Woods.

They raced toward the seashore. The water was violent with waves. It reminded him of an old dream when he'd turned thirty. It'd been years since he thought about that.

Wallis brought them all to a complete stop in front of the largest ship Sarantos had ever seen. There was one giant clearly in charge bellowing out orders while moving side to side across the deck to make sure all was in order. Several other giants could be seen carrying out his orders.

The side of the ship read, Moonflower. I'm sure she had no idea the impact her dying had on all of the giants.

“Quickly,” yelled Sarantos. “The ship is getting ready to leave.”

They all started to run up the giant plank that touched the shoreline.

When they reached the top they were out of breath. A giant of very large girth met them on the deck right away.

“What are you doing here? This boat is for giants only who go to a secret island for help. Humans destroyed our home and aren't welcome here. Be off before I throw you overboard.”

“Stoneburl.”



“Wizard, you dare speak my name? Who told you my name?”

“I heard it recently from your old friend, but I also know you from the wars. I fought by your side. I’m still sorrowful about the past events of mankind. I’m not of mankind, I’m Wallis, the wizard and I’m from The Sixties.”

His brow furrowed and he picked up the wizard as if to reconsider if he did in fact know Wallis. His frown slowly became a grin.

“Why you, old scoundrel. How’ve you been? How’d you hear about what I do? What brings you here?”

“Moonflower and the gem of Mandrake. Moonflower is alive and can’t leave the woods. It’s true, my friend. I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen her with my own eyes. I have gifts for Mandrake. She wants him home. We stumbled across her when we searched for the flower to help Sergio.” He pointed to the elf.

“Sergio, Muriele, Mika, and Aurora, I can’t believe my eyes! I’d be honored to carry you across the sea. My old friends it’s so good to see you but we have a schedule to keep. We must leave now. I do so want to hear your story about Moonflower. My heart can hardly stay in my chest!”

He bellowed orders that could be heard over the entire ship. He was weathered with a tough exterior and apparently a kind heart on the interior.

\*\*\*



Leigh stood next to him on the deck of the ship as the sun rose over the pounding sea. He thought about writing a song about the sails as they billowed overhead but his creative ponderings were cut short. He looked at Leigh and thought he should marry her. Why would he not? There was no one else that made him feel alive. Maybe he should even marry her on Halloween. Ghosts, witches, goblins and friends. Halloween never really needed a reason to be the best party of the season. Maybe one day soon, he thought to himself.

The wind whipped the sails and for a moment he thought he saw a black cat on top of a large pumpkin. Nah, it couldn’t be, could it? Hmm...