

Chapter 11

“Bubbles”

The days had seemed long as they travelled over the vast rough sea heading to a place no one could see.

The wizard and his other friends that'd known Stoneburl had spent several days catching up on what they'd been doing with their lives since they last saw each other. It was a joyous celebration. Nostalgia and sentimentality lifted the mood among the shipmates.

Whenever Sarantos and Leigh wanted to laugh and remove themselves from the monotony of the deck and the endless crashing waves, they'd venture occasionally into the room that held so much laughter and incessant chatter.



Stoneburl had musicians playing songs with harps, flutes and harmonicas. Their music was very happy and even encouraged some of the giants to stand up and dance. The dwarf stayed constantly with the party group and never came out onto the deck. He loved the ale and the limitless supply of food. He ate like a giant!

One night after Sarantos and Leigh had arrived inside, the dwarf was dancing and singing a lively dwarf ballad. It was laid out with some pretty heavy drama at the end but it surprisingly showed a sensitive, emotional and talented side of Switch that they only noticed on a few very rare occasions.

The evening turned into morning before they all finally retired to their sleeping quarters.

“Land ahoy!”

The loud shout quickly brought Sarantos into the moment.

“Good grief. What’s all the racket?”

“Sarantos, it sounds like we’ve found the Isle of Girth.”

“What, really? That’s great news Leigh.” He kissed her lightly before jumping up excitedly, pulling on his clothes while racing to the door. But when he got to the door Leigh was already there.

“I can’t beat you at anything, can I?” He said in a playful and lighthearted tone.

“Nope. I rule, as you would say.”

He grabbed her hand and together they went out onto the deck as quickly as they could.



The wind was strong and the waves were crashing hard against the side of the ship. The sea was like a rabid water monster easily splashing its guts a few feet over the top of the deck. Stoneburl was rushing around helping with key tasks while simultaneously barking out orders. All the giants were working in sync to control the boat, including some that were only on the trip as guests.

Wallis was on the bow of the ship with Mika at his side. The wizard looked their way and pointed north.

There in the distance was a heavy fog that didn't appear to be moving. He stared at it and saw nothing for a while, then a large land mass rose like a castle around a giant moat. Then it somehow disappeared. Did his eyes deceive him? The boat quickly turned and headed straight for the fog. It made him a little nervous.

“Maybe we should go down below the deck,” Sarantos urged Leigh.

“No, I want to see this my love. I want to be a part of this moment right here Sarantos.”

He nodded. He knew Leigh and he'd never be able to talk her out of it so why persist?

The boat moved faster, almost as if the fog was pulling them in. He grabbed Leigh and held her close as they grazed the mist.

He couldn't see anything anymore. Suddenly, out of the heavy fog rose an iceberg. He must've developed a sea madness. It was too warm out for icebergs but the ship was heading straight for one.

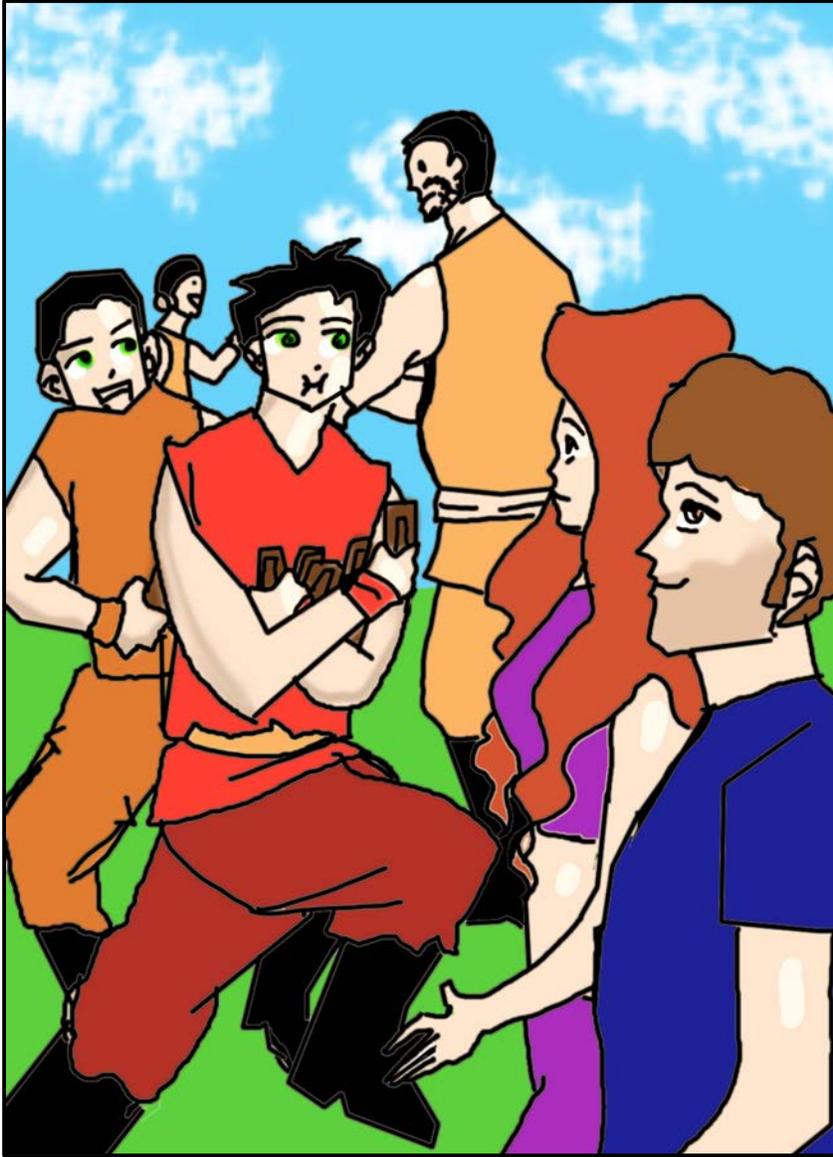
He screamed over the violent waves. “Stoneburl, the iceberg! It'll sink us!”

He grabbed Leigh and tried to drag her below deck, although he didn't know if that would be a good idea if they were going to crash. She resisted. He closed his eyes and readied himself for the impact.

It never came.

“Sarantos, look!”

He felt the boat stop rocking as he slowly opened his eyes. There was now a beautiful Island in front of them and the calm sea carried them ever so gently, closer and closer to it.



Sarantos had never seen so many giants in one location. It was a surreal moment to witness. He'd never had the privilege of seeing the children of this unusual race, but there were many running up to greet all of the passengers. Their hands were open and they giggled loudly. Most were as tall as him, but their faces were cherub-like and youthful. They were full of life and their enthusiasm was pretty obvious.

Stoneburl stepped forward and threw chocolates into the hands of the waiting children. As soon as they couldn't hold any more in their

hands, they'd run off and play with each other while shoving chocolates into their mouths. It made him smile.

An elderly female approached Stoneburl. Her grey hair was braided far down her back. The red robes she wore made a flimsy, swishing sound every time she moved. They spoke in whispers. Soon her face mirrored confusion but then delight. The giant must have told her about Moonflower. She turned to the group.

“Welcome, Wallis, Wizard of Friendship, kindness and bravery. I’ve longed to see you again and hear your marvelous stories.” She nodded approvingly towards him as she spoke.

Wallis replied. “It’s my pleasure to look upon the wise and mystic, Celeren, once again.”

She looked at the rest of the group and said, “You are welcome here as friends of one that has earned our eternal friendship.” With that, she turned and started walking up a small hill with Stoneburl next to her. The wizard followed her motioning for the rest of them to do the same.

After several hours of walking, they finally arrived at the top of the hill. Sarantos looked out over the calm sea as it circled the entire island. The land mass was quite big but from this vantage point, you could observe most of the island without difficulty.

The trees way on top were truly different, not plain at all. They were covered in lush and fully blooming but different types of flowers that smelled intoxicating. They were following a stone path that moved in sync with the land, almost like it wasn’t placed there, but belonged to it somehow. Trellises were part of the décor as bright, florescent-green vines weaved in and out of it offering tiny buds of blue flowers that looked like forget-me-nots.

They moved into a clearing and there he was, the giant Mandrake. A gem that was as large as a car and sparkled with a million faces sat in front of his throne. He had sad eyes that looked right past them and into a world only he lived in, somewhere in his head. Surely, he must have a tiny light left in those eyes but Sarantos couldn’t



see one. He wore soft leather and had several huge rings on his hands. One gem was orange. He twirled it absentmindedly.

Celeren said, “Mandrake, you’ll want to welcome Stoneburl and the wizard, Wallis.”

The giant raised his heavy head. “Wallis, my old friend? Stoneburl, you came to visit?”

Still though, no glint in his eyes. No sign of life. Utter hopelessness

hung in the air around him. Gloom and pain in every breath.

Wallis moved next to Mandrake and touched his hand. “Yes, it is me old friend and I come bearing the best news.”

“Welcome, wizard. Speak then.”

The wizard never said a word, but took the items out of his satchel that were given to him by Moonflower, and handed them to the giant.

The giant's face went pale and his eyes teared immediately. Confusion and the desire to believe were alternating rapidly back and forth. His expression changed from second to second. He looked right at the wizard.

“What trick is this mage? Do my own eyes deceive me? Is my heart so far gone I’ve created this image in my mind? It can’t be, can it??”

“It is Mandrake. I would never trick you, my old friend. It is real.”

As the wizard began to tell their story to the giant, Mandrake stared into the wizard’s soul, listening for falsehood. He feared deception. When Wallis finally finished speaking, the giant threw his drained face into his massive hands and wept. They all waited for what seemed like an hour.

“Celeren,” the giant finally whispered. “We’ll have a feast for my friends and I will cure Sergio of this horrible hold over his spirit. Come forward Sergio.”



The giant took his hands and placed them both on the gem as Celeren started incanting. The words were a powerful magic, but very ancient, so Sarantos couldn’t grasp the actual meaning behind them. He watched as Sergio jolted and fidgeted while the giant held him firmly to the gem. It looked like he was being tortured but the giant wouldn’t let him go. After Celeren screamed the last few phrases, the gem lit up and sent a charge through Sergio that made his skin look like the texture

of the gem. Finally, the giant released him and he collapsed exhausted into Murielle's arms.

"He'll be unconscious for a day, and after he awakens we will leave to see my dearest Moonflower."

The giant's eyes were alive and gleamed with white light. There was a newfound sense of purpose to his smile. The color of his skin looked different. He seemed overjoyed.

"I'll take him to a room where he can rest undisturbed." Stoneburl lifted Sergio and left the circle; Murielle followed.

He stared at the Mandrake for a moment and wondered if the giant was still afraid of believing in this miracle? He took Leigh's hand and held it tightly.

Celeren said, "Mandrake, this changes everything for the giants who've come to depend on you. This is your magic. Will it leave if you do?"

"Celeren, check to see what magic you might need to place a hold on. You understand, I must go. It's not a choice and not open for discussion. I've given my life to heal others and if this is possible for me and Moonflower, no one should dare deny me this joy."

Celeren nodded and left. Mandrake stood up beckoning them to join him for a celebration.

The festival was wonderful. Giants did magic tricks, sang, danced and drank – almost as much as the dwarf!

They were sat at the head table with Mandrake and Celeren. Stoneburl was sitting with his own wife and children.

Wallis leaned over and whispered. “Sarantos, I’m so glad they remembered me. I wasn’t sure what happened over the years to all of them, and I’ve stayed away because of my sorrow. This adventure for Sergio turned out to be much safer than I’d anticipated. Of course, thanks to our discovery of Moonflower.”

“Yes, I see what you mean, Wallis.”

The night was lively and even Bear sang about animals and plants. The giants loved his beefy voice and his stories so kept begging for more. Blayke and Aurora danced together for the first time. The night was truly otherworldly.

They all retired late after many hours of partying.

Sergio had recovered nicely and was permanently himself again. Soon they’d return to their home to feast and celebrate. There would be a week of rejoicing to honor him as the rightful king once again. They were all invited of course. His health had brought tears to the elf’s joyful eyes.

Mandrake had said his final goodbyes to all his friends. He’d appointed a giant by the name of Cliff to take over his position. He’d assisted Mandrake on numerous occasions and the giant thought he understood who should be honored by the gem so he could keep the tradition alive and well. Celeren had managed a spell to keep

the gem in its rightful place of honor. Everything was working out. Mandrake promised to return on occasion to check on things on the island. Stoneburl said he'd meet him at the docks to keep him informed of the giants at the Isle of Girth. The town's folks had arrived at the docks just before they sailed off to honor Mandrake once more, and wish him health and good fortune. They were happy for him.

Sarantos looked out to the sea as they made their way to the docks in front of Woodworm Woods. He had a lot on his mind, after experiencing firsthand the incredible journey of this rare type of unselfish love this giant had for his woman. It tore at his own heart. He was lucky to have found a woman like Leigh. He didn't want to lose her. He never wanted to be apart from her again!

“Are you going to marry her Sarantos?”

“I'm thinking about it, Mika. I really am. I want to. Do you think she'd say yes??”

The cat was always listening in on his thoughts, but didn't always intervene. Only when the protective cat felt it was necessary did he nudge. Sarantos laughed.

“What's so funny, Sarantos?” Leigh had just come back onto the deck.

“Oh, nothing. Just Mika having some fun with me. That's all.”

She smiled at the big cat. Sometimes he thought they were in cahoots together. They were both women after all.

When they arrived at the dock, Mandrake could hardly contain his excitement. “Let’s go!” Off he ran down the boarding plank.

They all followed as quickly as their meager, tiny feet would carry them.

“Wait up, Mandrake. We have little folk with us!” Stoneburl hurried to catch up. He picked up the dwarf as he ran by him.

“Woah, there Stoneburl, at least give a dwarf fair warning. I nearly cut your hand off with me axe!”

Sarantos shook his head smiling uncontrollably all the while running as fast as he could to try and keep up. Leigh grabbed his hand and winked at him. They were suddenly flying about two feet off the ground, moving like a small plane. Blayke, Aurora, Bear, Murielle, Sergio and the wizard were soon attached to the magical air train as their laughter filled the air. Mika blinked and was waiting at the entrance when they all arrived.

Mandrake was shaking as he entered the woods with the small group of travelers. He was nervous.



They walked for a while when they heard a beautiful voice singing a love song. Mandrake stopped and tears once again flowed down his cheeks, but he managed to start singing back. The woman's voice stopped cold.

The giant sang again. The ground rumbled under their feet and the woods opened in front of them. Moonflower now

appeared at the entrance. She stopped moving. Time slowed. Her tears couldn't be contained. She tried to stop but she wept openly. Finally, she gathered herself and ran to her husband. Mandrake swept her up into his massive arms and kissed her face, hair, hands and neck all while deeply inhaling the smell of her hair as she infused his soul with energy. They both started laughing uncontrollably. Delirium spread among all witnesses.

Sarantos started weeping with Leigh. So did everyone else. It was a divine and perfect reunion.

Mandrake stepped back from his wife and slowly caressed her face. “How can this be? Is it magic?”

Moonflower laughed, “It’s the magic of our love, my darling. The magic of love.”

Before he could reply, the ghosts and black cats came out from the woods and jumped onto Mandrake. They hugged him. Several cats even climbed up to the top of his head and made themselves comfortable. “Friends of yours?”

“Yes,” Moonflower replied.

“Good, then they’re all friends of mine, as well.”

The trek to Moonflowers home was filled with joy.

Mandrake couldn’t believe his eyes. The painting, the flowers, the orange and black colors everywhere...

“You waited for me?”

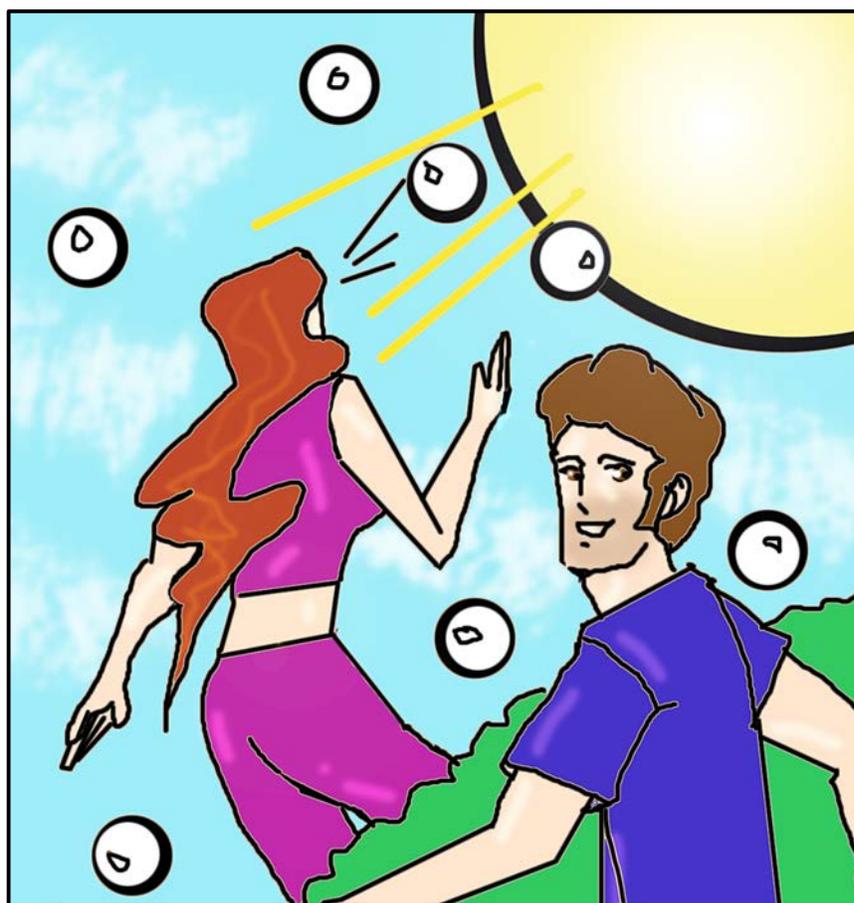
“Yes, of course. I knew one day you’d return. We shall get remarried tomorrow and glorify our new beginning with our friends who made it all possible.”

“I think that’s a splendid idea. What about it Wallis? Are you and your friends available for another party? Or are you still recovering from the last one?”

“Sure, I can’t think of any other place I’d rather be.”

One of the ghosts was a licensed priest, so he wanted to do the honors. Of course he did. Could this get any more perfect?

Sarantos went outside by the patio. He sat on a bench by the flowers taking it all in as a warm breeze blew across his face. The sweet smell of Leigh’s scent moved with the gust right into his soul. Then, she was there next to him.



“Do you hear the bubbles, Sarantos?”

“Yes, it’s the joy I think. I remember playing with bubbles when I was a kid, like all kids do. Bubbles are easy to make. They come in all shapes and sizes and are full of life. They are full of endless possibilities. They are simple. They’re incredible. They make me feel daring and free. They are real. There are bubbles of positivity all around me. They nourish my spirit.”

Bubbles floated by them as if on cue. Everywhere they looked, they saw bubbles. Bubbles reflecting all sorts of colors and rainbows off their surface. Soon bubbles filled the entire sky. The jewels held within the bubbles were ready to burst. There was a youthful, hopeful and vibrant energy everywhere.

“Leigh, look at the bubbles. They are floating next to me. They are daring and carefree. They are touching us with their happiness. They make me happy too. I feel lively and free.”

His head continued spinning as he watched the bubbles increase in size and number. Each one that popped haphazardly created four more. It was amazing. The moment took his breath away.

Finally, he knew what he should do. For the first time in his life, he would follow his heart. There was so much he always wanted to do but he was scared. Always fearful to do anything for himself. Never wanting to be selfish. He never did anything he wanted. He always thought of others first. He always tried to make others happy, even before himself. But now he wanted to do what made him happy and that meant being with Leigh. She made him feel like he could do anything. She made him feel alive. He wanted to make her happy too.

“Leigh, do you hear the bubbles?”

“Yes, Sarantos.”

“Do you hear the bubbles sing? The melody they sing for you and me? My heart beats in sync with them!”

“Yes, my love. And my heart beats in sync with yours.”

He took her hands in his and felt the freedom at last - the excitement and overjoyed anticipation at a possible future life with Leigh. He knew what he wanted. He wanted the same love that he'd witnessed with his friends on this adventure. He wanted Leigh. Why should he deny it? Why should he not be with her? He was calm. He was not nervous at all. He went for it...

“Leigh, I hear the bubbles, too.”

“Sarantos?”



There was no hesitation. He got down on one knee. “Leigh, will you marry me?”

Without warning, the bubbles started popping like crazy. There was popping everywhere, almost like fifty people just opened fifty bottles of champagne at the same exact instant.

“Yes! YES!! Yes my love!” Leigh started to cry tears of joy.

They couldn't even kiss because the bubbles filled the air around them and kept

popping in joy. They seemed like they would lift them up into the sky. He grabbed her hand and ran inside hoping to steal a kiss.

There they shared the most romantic kiss ever.

The wizard looked out the window. “Ah, the bubbles of joy have taken you two over I see. And can we expect a wedding sometime soon?”

“Yes, wizard. If Mandrake and Moonflower will allow it, I want to share our day with them because their love is so pure. I want ours to be the same way. I want to be devoted to Leigh for all of eternity.”

“Well, it looks like it’ll be three weddings tomorrow?” Wallis slyly suggested.

“What do you mean?” asked Leigh.

Wallis finally revealed, “Because those darn bubbles of bliss infected Blayke too, and I guess Aurora since she has agreed to be his wife.”

Sarantos ran over to Blayke and hugged him. “Well, I agree too my friend, if Mandrake and Moonflower allow us.”

“Well, of course we do.” Moonflower said from the corner of the room. That’s the magic of this place and if your love is joined here it, will surely last for eternity.”

“Wizard, what about Adele?” Mika questioned.

“No Mika. Adele and I are good where we’re at. Not everyone has to be married my hairy friend. We’re devoted for always, already.”

“Sure, I understand.”

Only this special group that shared a singular experience was there today. Of course, no one could keep out the ghosts and cats. The decorations were magnificent and it looked like a Halloween wedding. Sarantos and Leigh didn’t mind.



Orange bubbles filled the terraced walkway and they all had to move them aside to walk down the path to take their wedding vows.

First, was Moonflower and Mandrake, then came Aurora and Blayke, and now it was Sarantos and Leigh’s turn.

The sincerity of their vows danced across his heart as he walked next to Leigh. His future wife. He couldn’t ask for a better life. He’d come a long way since wanting a new career at being a singer at the ripe old age of 30. And here he was about to marry the most

amazing and mysterious woman across several universes. His heart felt like a bubble that kept growing with oxygen every time he breathed in Leigh's purity. His heart basked in her warmth. God, he loved her and he loved this land.

He took her hand and then sang her a song he'd written just for this moment. She cried and her eyes shone like love's waterfall. There was a genuinely happy vibe among all the friends. There was no fakeness and no hidden agendas. They were all truly happy for each other.

They would go home eventually to partake in two other weddings, his friends, Brad and Derek and their wives. He was sorry they couldn't join him on this special day, but he knew they would've made the same choice if they'd seen the magical floating bubbles.



“I do,” said Leigh.

“Do you hear the bubbles, Sarantos,” she asked under her breath with a sexy playful grin?

“I do, my love. I do. I also hear my heart beat for you...”