

Chapter 10

“You (just) Don’t Have It”



It was late morning by the time they’d left Moon’s Inn and headed toward the city of Wallow. The day was pleasant but a little chilly. The delightful scenery to Willow’s Ale made the trip worthwhile though. The unusual coloration of flowers proved enchanting. One flower caught Sarantos eye that grew along the hillsides and was painted like the tint of chocolate ice cream. The flowers spread out with a velvety flair and even had a sultry smoothness to them. He could have eaten

them and not thought twice about it. The seductive scent made him hungry for the cool treat.

“Yummy,” he said out loud.

“Try one, Sarantos.”

The calm voice of Blayke chimed in, as he meandered next to him. He turned awkwardly to look at his friend, because he couldn’t be sure if he was playing with him or not. Murielle had warned him to watch out for all of them, especially together, for they loved to play pranks. He looked at the other elves to see if any of them had a smirk on their faces or turned their

head hoping to see him indulge himself, until of course the moment they couldn't keep it inside and would burst out laughing at his silliness. However, no one was paying any attention. He studied Blayke's face for a minute longer and then walked over to the flowers. Immediately, the smell intoxicated him with the aroma of chocolate.

He picked two of the flowers and turned to Blayke, "You'll join me naturally, won't you, my friend?" He thought if he tried one as well, it was bound to be okay.

To his surprise Blayke reached out his hand and took one. "Thanks," he said and shoved it in his mouth. His face contorted into one of pleasure, unless Sarantos misinterpreted it as a painful expression attempting to show enjoyment.

Nevertheless, he opened his mouth and repeated his friend's action by shoving it into his own mouth. Wham! Instantly he felt a chocolate ice cream explosion! What ecstasy. What bliss. It even offered a cool taste on the very tip of his tongue. He loved travelling to different worlds; discovery of unique things was always a possibility and the prospects were limitless!

"Can I take some of these with me for later?"

"Nope. That's why they're still beautiful along the hillside. If they lasted long after cutting them, they would have surely been extinct long ago.

Personally, I find it refreshing that a plant can protect itself from plungers, unlike many creatures and plants that no longer exist because of the greed of others and their inability to know when to stop and just be glad they've found a beautifully rare and treasured moment."

Sarantos nodded his head both in understanding and shame, knowing what his planet was doing to the environment, to other creatures and to each other.

Then he wondered about his own reaction. He did want to take more with him. He learned a lot from these people in a world that he never knew existed, until the day a big black cat had jumped into his shower out of a magical portal.

Since then, his life was an epic adventure and he often found himself looking into a mirror with a magnifying glass curiously studying his own reflection. This journey hadn't been just about meeting new people, exploring different worlds, uncovering unusual mysteries, but about something grander—something deeper inside him. He'd learned to glimpse into his own fractured soul. Accepting the good qualities while facing those annoying qualities that he didn't know existed was a distinct challenge. Although, his friends had contributed to that greatly, he had been the one to uncover his innermost self and understand it enough to change it while embracing it. Yes, this life definitely spelled incredible adventure. He only had to open his eyes.

They moved quickly through a hilly terrain and approached a heavily wooded area that was laid out in front of them, leaving behind the stench of chocolate.



The path dipped down a steep incline and proceeded around the uptight forest, not venturing into the dark depths of thick trees, overrun brushes, a strange spiky-looking plant that seemed to have a personality that bordered on sinister, and vines that wrapped the trees threatening to choke the life out of them as they hung gracefully supplying a canopy effect over the entire woodland area.

“What kind of plant is that?” Brad stood pointing at the dramatic looking spiky plant Sarantos was just wondering about himself.

He was sure Brad was looking at it through particular eyes, those of an alchemist.

Bow answered him, “That is a plant worth noticing, but not touching. Those lovely purple spikes will get inside your skin causing unconsciousness, paralysis and then death. Some have tried to extract the spikes to use for rendering their enemies into an obvious state of no return, but to their surprise the plant protects itself and unleashes spores when touched on leaf or stem, which have the same exact effect as its spikes. It’s called Death and has earned the name very much throughout the years.”

“Alright, I think that about concludes my research of this plant. But, I do have one question, is there a cure?” Brad asked as he moved more towards the middle of the road.

“No, there is no known cure, because to study it is literally impossible, and by the way, my friend, gloves don’t help either. The spores attach to the gloves and when you take them off they drop to your skin, invisible and deadly. So even if you managed to get the plant to a place to study it, the spores would affect everything the plant touched.” Bow continued to walk along the road with a casual flair, but Sarantos knew his eyes were watching everywhere and he was faithfully listening to the land around him even as he spoke to them.



Brad wasn’t finished with his inquisitive thoughts about Death. “If the plant is so deadly, where are the bodies of woodland creatures or human remains that it has killed?”

Bow turned and looked at Brad, as though he were an alien. “Nature takes care of itself. A spiked creature called Animiole lives in cahoots with Death, and its job is to clean up and eat the leftovers, including the bones. It’s

immune to the effects of the plant. Call it a carrion animal, of sorts.”

“Wonderful,” said Brad.

Sarantos couldn't help himself and allowed an uninhibited laugh flood the path as the group walked towards Wallow.

It was dusk as they arrived in the large town of Wallow. It didn't suit its name, because the trees around the town almost sang with the bristling sounds of people moving about. The smell of food wafted through the air, as vendors offered delightful looking mini meals served on what looked like giant grape leaves. The group stopped there as Wallis and Sergio talked quietly and surveyed their surroundings. This town didn't look like it was in trouble to Sarantos.

He looked at the vendor next to him; the smell of an interesting looking goulash was simmering in a large black pot over a hot bed of coals. He was hungry and zestfully inched his way over. A woman had been bent over facing away from him, but when he approached she seemed to sense his presence and stood up greeting him with a beautiful toothy smile.

“Good day. This is my gran's favorite dish. She called it stewlish.” Then she let out a dainty laugh that was quite charming. He couldn't help but smile.

“What's in it?”

“Chicken, peas, potatoes, carrots but some of the food can't be told.” She giggled. “That's part of the secret recipe. You'll just have to try it. Two shillings.” She winked at him and unbuttoned the top button on her ruffled white blouse, exposing more of her voluptuous breasts.



He couldn't remove his eyes from her teasing banter. She looked to be in her twenties with red wild hair that flowed gently down over her left bosom while she flipped her head to the side tossing her hair around like a blazing fire. She was tall with long fingers that had brightly colored nails, and her eyes were a deep brown shimmering with a mischievous twinkle. She held out her hand for him to place the shillings

in her palm.

He reached into his pocket and placed the shillings in her hand without taking his eyes from hers. She was a little tease he thought.

She smiled and lifted her skirt showing off a nicely shaped leg as she placed the money in a pouch strapped around her thigh. She lowered her skirt slowly and laughed her dainty laugh. She reached out and grabbed a leaf and started piling the meat fixings onto it. He couldn't stop watching her, studying the way her body moved and was annoyed at showing any interest at all in this complete stranger. Then out of nowhere she started singing with a soft and sensuous voice. He watched her move towards him with a sexy walk, not a waddle - she looked like a super model as she held out his food seductively in front of him.

He took the food and the aroma calmly filled his nostrils, as she rubbed her chest up against his arm. He was alarmed and yet somehow pleasantly surprised.

She smiled sweetly and said, "I live at 5 E on Mandrid and my name is Marla. Why don't you come by later this evening, maybe we can get better acquainted?"

It hadn't been a question, but more like a statement after a decision had already been made.

After he received her name, rank and serial number he thought for a moment about how cute she was, but knew exactly what he felt.

The dwarf suddenly appeared next to him and said, "I'm not interfering or anything am I?" His voice was sarcastic, not that that was unusual for Switch, but before Sarantos could say a word he'd continued, "Lassie give me one of those fine leaf sandwiches, and I'm not interested in bosom today so be quick about it."



Marla looked at Sarantos like he was supposed to do something to send this dwarf to another vendor, or to the moon. He stood there with a stupid look on his face instead. He didn't want to smile.

He shrugged. "Sorry, Marla, you just don't have it—that one thing that I fancy. That something that I want. That something that drives me crazy.

Not interested." She wasn't Leigh. She just didn't have it. She just didn't do it for him, or so he said to himself over and over nervously.

She reached her arm up and her hand tried to take a smack at him across the face, but he'd already turned away and started to head back to the group while eating the delicious snack.

He heard her cursing behind him, as the huge voice of the dwarf overshadowed her ramblings. "What? Two shillings are you mad, wrench?"

"Take it or leave it, dwarf," she bellowed."

"Hell, if I wasn't starving you could keep your over-priced grub!"

"Just take it and get out of here, slob!"

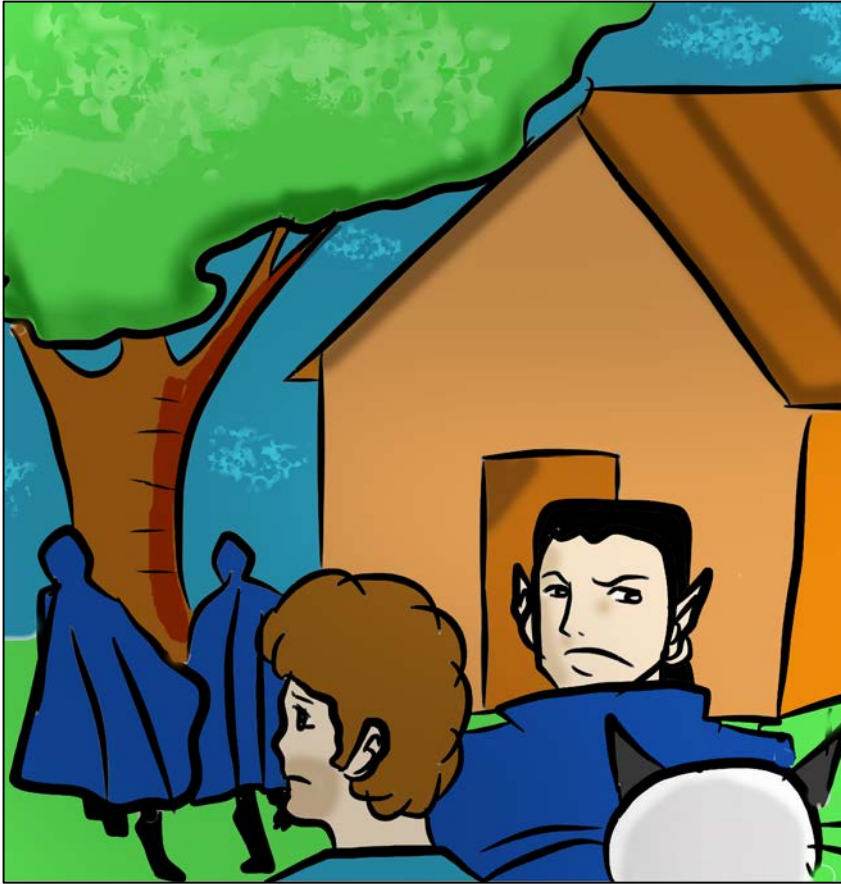
If it hadn't been food, Sarantos knew the dwarf would have thrown it at her, but he never wasted a savory bite, well except for what fell out of his mouth as he ate. He was a dwarf after all!

The dwarf grumbled as he walked away until he eventually stood beside Sarantos. He shoved the warm food into his mouth as pieces dropped onto his beard. He started to complain again while using his arm to wipe his mouth.

"This isn't half bad, but I've had better. Crazy woman, I forgot to get me ale!" He spoke between chewing and without a care.

Sarantos grinned his scary grin.

He looked over at his friends and noticed Blayke, Adele and Halo had left the group and they were nowhere within his line of vision. That explained why the dwarf joined him at the vendors booth. Blayke, his bodyguard had another mission and the dwarf was his momentary replacement. Although, it was perfect timing for the dwarf because food was involved and that was his favorite pastime anyway, eating and drinking.



The elves quickly wrapped their cloaks about their shoulders and pulled their hoods over their heads. The dark cloaks covered part of their faces and hid the fact they were elves under the shadows guise. Murielle, Shawn, and Star headed in a westerly direction and they quickly disappeared from view, almost like vaporous substances that you weren't sure

you'd seen, somewhat ghostly, in-fact.

He turned just in time to see Bow and Thunder disappear in exactly the same manner, except their vapor dissipated in an easterly direction. Well, that's that, they were in a moment left on their own. Now only Mika and Sergio possessed the ability to see the metalists.

Mika stood next to him, as Wallis and Sergio were still conversing using faint whispers and jerky hand motions.

Brad re-joined them with a large leaf sandwich with something red and green hanging down the sides. He'd most certainly been to a different booth. He fell in next to Sarantos.

“What's that, Brad?”

“Not sure, but it's got one hell of a kick!”

Music filled the air with inviting sounds. The town had a party attitude and appeared to be free of metalists, at least, as much as Sarantos could tell.

The wizard half turned his head over his right shoulder and said, “Stay close. We’re heading directly to Willow’s Ale.

“Sure,” said Sarantos.

Mika moved in beside Wallis and Sergio as they fell to the rear of the group. Sarantos walked in the middle with Brad and the dwarf to either side of him. He wondered how they could seal in a town as large as this one and nonchalantly find all the metalists while doing it?

They headed north through groups of people who seemed quite friendly and enjoyed milling about through the streets. They were full of energy. It certainly was a prosperous town with loads of vendors lining the streets. Nicely designed brick buildings loomed behind them. There were exclusive shops offering fine jewellery, hand-made silk clothing, leather footwear and gear, not to mention, an armory where the sounds of a blacksmith hammering innocent shiny metal into intricate weaponry and sturdy armor could be heard as he worked out in front of his store in plain site.

Sarantos didn’t think he could create something so fine in front of all these people.

He loved the feel of this town. The laughter, music, smells, fresh air, bartering and dance held a friendly yet enthusiastic party atmosphere. He could tell by Brad’s grin how much his friend was enjoying the experience of a real honest to goodness renaissance fair.



Children were running through the streets with painted faces and eating something that resembled cotton candy.

They arrived at a small stone bridge that curved like an arch up and over a small river. Beautiful orange flowers were laid across the top that added a sense of flair and color. The water was a murky brown but when they got to the top of the

bridge and he looked into the slow moving river, it became a clear sea green. Magic, he thought.

Mika walked slowly peering from side to side, watching and waiting to spot metalists, but everything seemed normal. When they encountered them previously, Sarantos felt there was a certain air of weirdness around them that he'd come to sense. He still had those songs he'd created while he and Mika hid away in an upstairs room at the inn. If he didn't freak out, he might get a chance to use them and see how well they worked, or didn't work.

He wished they could stop and enjoy the atmosphere of this town, but it seemed like Wallis wanted to get to the inn before dark. The moon was almost full as it became brighter and brighter against a darkening sky.

Mika stopped abruptly in front of them, causing everyone to carefully search the area. Her nose twitched and she crouched down lower to the ground than he ever thought the big cat could get. The wizard turned to his left, and Sergio instantly appeared behind a small child that appeared about eight

years old. He suddenly grabbed the child, pulled her into his cloak and they disappeared, as the wizard calmly lowered his staff.



They continued walking forward, but Sergio hadn't returned. Now, Sarantos was really troubled.

He wondered why Sergio had grabbed a small child. Could the Metalists have infiltrated the young? Good grief that was inconceivable! It would make it harder for him and Brad to destroy one, but he quickly remembered past wars - how children were used to blow up soldiers and that's when he

realized all's fair in love and war, or so the saying goes. You do what you need to for your survival and the survival of those you love. He would not let anyone down. He would do or die, that was his new mantra, one that he repeated over and over in his head. It wasn't a fearful mantra, because he knew if he followed the mantra, more than likely he wouldn't die. It was the act of doing nothing that could cost him or his friends their lives. He would not make that mistake.

The moon was high in the sky and the stars blazed across the heavens when Sergio was suddenly beside the wizard again, whispering something to him. He moved quietly to the back of the group and continued his vigilant watch over his friends.

Sarantos could use a drink and the dwarf started grumbling about needing food or he might pass out. Their walk to the inn seemed endless.

They turned a corner that had a wonderful old-fashioned lamp burning brightly with orange flowers hanging from the top.

“There it is. Willow’s Ale,” said the wizard.

“Finally,” moaned the dwarf.



The building was a soft bluish/pink stone with inlaid pictures of the same orange flowers that were used to decorate the town of Wallow. The windows were large with a Tudor style design but with a gothic twist. The main window had a carefully enclosed clear and colored glass in a very sophisticated style. The huge wooden door had

a handle that appeared to be brass shaped into the head of a dragon. The body was beautifully designed as the handle came to rest at the bottom with a tiny orange flower. What gives with the flower?

The door was so heavy it almost took two of them to open it.

The interior was elegant and had a check-in woman who was dressed like an aristocrat, very high class, indeed. Her hair was pulled up and perfectly set in place. The makeup she wore was gentle, but outlined in fine detail along her lips and eyes.

The room was gently lit and couches were placed in front of extremely large fireplaces, adding a homey appeal. The kitchen must be to the back because this was clearly a sitting room, as men sat in couches and high backed chairs peacefully smoking pipes and drinking. Women moved about talking quietly with friends from group to group, never settling too long in one conversation.

“How can I help you, sir?” Her voice was soft and held an aged quality.

“I need three rooms for the night.” The wizard pulled out his coin purse and smiled. Mika had already disappeared. This place obviously wouldn’t allow animals of any sort.

“Three gold, please,” the woman smiled back.

Sarantos knew the wizard didn’t like that response, as his shoulders hunched whenever he held in his anger. But, he paid nevertheless and received their keys promptly.

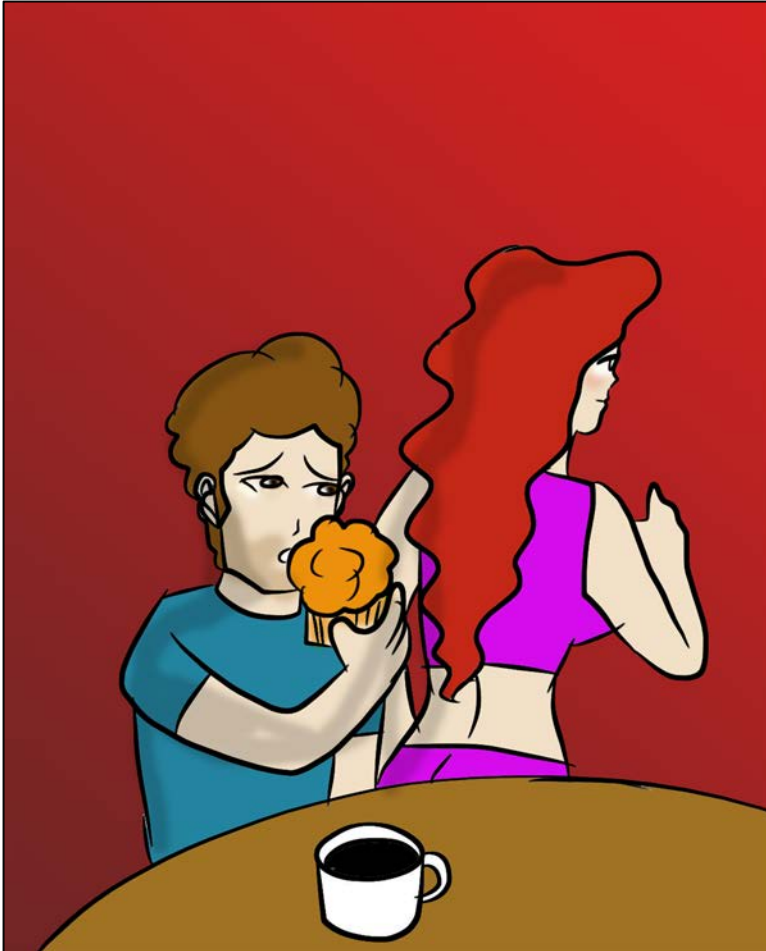
He started up a finely designed set of stairs with a beautifully carved banister. When they arrived at the top, he then grumbled all the way to their rooms about highway robbery.

Once they were behind closed doors Sarantos asked about the orange flowers.

“It’s their flower of breath - Angel. That’s what they call it, because it grows so abundantly along the river banks and hillsides and is a very tasty and nutritious meal having supplied them with food even when their crops had bad years. They can make almost anything out of it.”

“Oh.”

He sat down in the chair and realized he didn't want to know anymore about what happened to the child. So he didn't bother to ask. The room was large and already had a bright fire blazing away. There were three large beds and each room had their own private bathroom. Food was laid out on the table with coffee, ale and a variety of teas. A pot of water hung over the fire to be used for washing or tea water.



He missed Leigh and wished he could taste her sweet lips. He poured a coffee and bit into a tasty muffin of some sort. It was orange. He thought of the cute girl, Marla, but remembered her not so attractive mouth.

You're not Leigh. You just don't have it—that beautiful heart inside—it's exactly what I want. He ached for his one true love. When would he see her again? He wanted to hold her so badly.