

# A Season of Happiness



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## MOONBERRY PIE



MP95

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## STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE BEFUDDLED! Part Two

There she sat on her throne – Mamma Zeeta, the voodoo witch of the Pyth. She wore flowing robes adorned with feathers, bones and what appeared to be animal fangs. Her hair was rusty-red, tangled and hung down to her shoulders. Danny noticed something else about it: “Her hair’s moving.”

“There are things crawling around in it, that’s why,” observed Lucy, “Bugs of some kind. I think there are worms too.”

“Oh, yuck!” said her brother, “And her face is real scary-looking.”

That was one way to describe it. The flesh was probably pure white, but the strange glow in the room gave it an ominous green tinge. Her eyes were the most striking feature. They shone brightly, red coals in a sinister mask glaring at the intruders standing before her. Purple lips curled in an evil sneer and were spread open to reveal two rows of sharply-pointed, jet black teeth. Mamma Zeeta spoke at last: “Your kind desecrated my altar and forced me into exile,” she rasped, “And for that you will pay.”

“It wasn’t us,” said Nuff-Nuff defensively. “We were just bringing the thing back.”

“Nevertheless, you need to be taught a lesson you will not forget,” she grated. Looking past the group, she ordered: “Bring them closer.”

“It’s the Pyth,” said Lucy. “They’ve come to life. Granddad!” she shouted. “Come back RIGHT NOW!”

Mamma Zeeta heard Lucy and looked up, puzzled by the strange voice from above. The words meant nothing to her and were only a momentary distraction, maybe just something in her imagination. For Joshua, however, they were a wake-up call. Raising his cookie, and in a panic, he almost shouted the magic words: “MOONBERRY PIE!” In a flash, he had returned to his kitchen in the real world.

The three sitting at the table watched the next picture in the comic. A number of the Pyth had taken hold of Dib-Dob’s team and were forcing them towards the altar. Seeming not to have noticed Joshua’s disappearance, Mamma Zeeta rose from her throne and began moaning some unknown chant as she waved and shook an object in her hand. “What’s that?” asked Danny. “It looks like a stick with feathers on it.”

“I think it’s some kind of wand or charm; and the stick is a bone,” said his grandfather. “The ‘feathers’ are most likely human hair.”

“Gross!” said the boy; then: “Now she’s pointing it at our friends...”

Mamma Zeeta had stopped chanting; and as she pointed the charm at each of Dib-Dob’s team she said one, simple word: “Limbo.”

"What's limbo, Granddad?" asked Danny.

"It's being somewhere but nowhere," said Joshua, and realised the boy wouldn't understand. "Probably what zombies feel like: sort-of numb and lifeless. And by the looks of it, that's what Starlight, Moonshine, Nuff-Nuff and Dib-Dob have been reduced to." True enough: the four of them just stood there. The next picture showed a close-up of their faces. Their expressions were wooden, mouths sagging open; and their glazed eyes just stared ahead, seemingly at nothing. Another picture appeared showing their arms dangling loosely by their sides. "They've been hexed," declared Joshua with a sigh of dismay.

Obviously something had to be done; but what? The three reading the comic were about to discuss exactly this when the next picture-space filled in. It showed Henshaw with a food hamper, trudging along the pathway Moonshine had cut with his sword through the jungle. "Henshaw, it's me, Joshua," the old man said to the comic-book picture."

The giant penguin heard the voice, looked up and waved. "Hello Joshua. I'm taking them their lunch. I assume they're somewhere at the end of this track...?"

"Don't go a step further," Joshua warned, "Or you'll be walking into danger." Henshaw stopped and listened as Joshua told him what had happened to the others.

Danny was worried that his grandfather was taking too long with his explaining and said: "Hurry up, Granddad. You said time keeps moving in comic-book world same as here in the real world. While we're doing nothing, Mamma Zeeta could be hexing and voodooing more stuff on our friends."

"No, Danny, look." Joshua pointed at the next picture in the comic, making sure he didn't touch it. Actually, it wasn't a picture at all, just a blank square. "Until the next picture draws itself, or we make it appear by touching the blank space, time is standing still in comic-book world. The only active scene is the one with Henshaw in it. Before we allow the next one to happen, we need a plan."

Lucy had a sudden thought: "When I called out to you it seemed like Mamma Zeeta heard me. If we're going to talk about a plan, we should do it away from the comic."

Joshua nodded and pointed to a spot near the kitchen sink. "Let's go over there. And we should keep our voices down," he said in a whisper.

They talked and talked but came up with nothing useful. The main problem was to get their friends un-hexed, as Danny put it; but that would probably mean one of them having to Moonberry-Pie into Mamma Zeeta's room. "And she'd just wack voodoo on us," said the boy, "And we wouldn't want that, would we Brunswick?" he added, putting a hand up to his pocket. It was empty! "Oh, no...! Where's Brunswick?" All eyes quickly scanned the kitchen. Danny spotted the little mouse. "That's alright. He's over there on the table."

Although only a simple creature, Brunswick understood more about what was going on than anyone thought he could. He was crawling around on the comic because he had heard the voice of his special friend coming from it. So, he had gone to investigate. He'd found the picture with Henshaw in it and had tried squeaking, but apparently Henshaw couldn't hear him. By the time the others got back to the table, the little mouse had moved to the next picture; which was actually blank until his tiny feet touched it. They were the same as a human hand and from the real world; so the story had started up again. Oh, dear; what would that mean...?

Definitely something strange and unexpected was going on. The picture Brunswick had activated showed Mamma Zeeta staring up, eyes popping, a look of fear on her face. "I know you are near, Mighty Mikmow – I can smell you. Where are you? Why have you come? Have I done something to displease you?"

In the real world, Joshua's eyes had widened too as he realised what the voodoo witch was referring to. He put a finger on his lips, warning his grandchildren to stay quiet; then he spoke to the picture in a voice that was deep and booming: "You have, Mamma Zeeta. You have returned from exile where you were sent..."

"Not out of choice, Mighty Mikmow," pleaded Mamma Zeeta. "These ordinary people replaced the three-pointed star..."

"And you have hexed them for it!" he roared. "That was cruel; and you did so without my permission. I demand that you remove the curses immediately."

"But..." Mamma Zeeta was now trembling and shrinking lower on her throne.

"No buts, witch. Do as I command or the Mighty Mikmow will visit you in person; and you know what that means."

Would Joshua's threat work? The trio in the real world waited in anticipation. Brunswick was about to scuttle back to the picture with Henshaw in it. Joshua nudged the little mouse to stay over Mamma Zeeta's image. She glanced up and shivered. Then she was obviously gathering her courage and burying pride as she rose reluctantly from her throne and approached the four ordinary people she had hexed. Wagging the bone with the hair before them, she touched each in turn twice on the forehead with it. As she did, a transformation took place. Consciousness returned. They straightened and began gazing around in wonder. Lord Nuff-Nuff was the first to speak: "What just happened? Something did."

"I don't know," said Captain Starlight, "But even though it's gone now, I feel weird; and I can't remember why we are here, wherever here is, or even who I am."

"That's silly," chuckled Colonel Moonshine. "You're... um-er... Ah, I forget..."

There was still something else to be done before Dib-Dob's team were out of danger. Joshua addressed the comic again: "Hmm, passable. These people should now return from whence they came, but they clearly are too befuddled to do that without assistance. Assign some of your Pyth to guide them back to the native village where they are to be left unharmed."

While they waited for Mamma Zeeta to comply with the Mighty Mikmow's instructions, Joshua ushered the children over to stand beside the kitchen sink. "We need to do three things," said their grandfather. "Once the four have been escorted to the village, Henshaw must come and take them back to the beach. Now, it would seem they aren't quite with it and it's doubtful that Starlight and Moonshine will remember enough to sail the ship..."

"We can do that," Lucy butted in.

"Yeah," chirped Danny. "Like we did before – Lucy did the driving and I did the blow-up thing with the balloons."

Their grandfather thought about it for a moment, then nodded his approval. Both children were pleased at the prospect of sailing Captain Starlight's ship one more time. Lucy said: "That's two things - what was the third?"

"It will be risky," said Joshua, "And I think I'm going to have to do it on my own. I'm pretty sure Mamma Zeeta can't be trusted and she's only doing what she was told because she's afraid of the Mighty Mikmow. You've probably guessed that the

fearsome spirit she believes to be Mikmow is actually Brunswick; at least the smell of him. Once he is no longer on the comic, the voodoo witch's fear will be gone and who knows what she will do then. The only way I can think of to prevent that is..."

None of them were really happy about the plan, least of all Joshua; but it had to be done. Keeping Brunswick sitting on the picture with Mamma Zeeta in it, he watched the progress of the next picture showing the Pyth guiding Starlight, Moonshine, Nuff-Nuff and Dib-Dob to the native village. As soon as Henshaw appeared and ushered them onto the track through the jungle, it was time.

His magic cookie in one hand, he took up Brunswick in the other and called out: "Moonberry Pie!" Instantly both man and mouse were transported into comic-book world; in particular to Mamma Zeeta's house. The voodoo witch was shocked by the visitation. "The Mighty Mikmow orders you back to your throne," growled Joshua, opening his hand to reveal the little mouse sitting on his palm. "Refuse to do this and I, Mikmow's high priest, will release him and he will devour you on the spot."

A trembling Mamma Zeeta stumbled backwards and sat down on her throne with a thump. Joshua wasted not a second. Slipping Brunswick into a pocket, he moved quickly to the wooden altar, reached out a hand and plucked the three-pointed star from its recess. The room exploded in flashing light, thunder cracked and boomed. Mamma Zeeta cried out as her image began to fade; but only very slowly, though. As had happened with Dib-Dob, the artefact in Joshua's hand had warmed up and was vibrating. He could also feel his arm being stretched out towards the altar. Resisting the force, he quickly called out: "MOONBERRY PIE!"

The two children had been watching intently. As soon as their grandfather was back with them they switched attention to Henshaw's progress. He was ushering the others from the track onto the beach. Despite not remembering exactly who he was, Nuff-Nuff was complaining: "What are we doing here? I don't think I like sand."

Henshaw chuckled. "At least you haven't lost your sense of grumpiness. As for why we're here, we are going to Captain Starlight's ship."

"Oh, I have a ship, do I?" said Starlight in wonder.

Henshaw pointed out to sea where the ship was anchored. "There she is."

Nuff-Nuff scowled. "And how are we supposed to get there – swim?"

Henshaw tutted. "Always complaining, you. And we get there the same way I came – on the rowing boat..." He gasped. "It's gone! It must have washed out with the tide."

"Brilliant!" sneered Nuff-Nuff. "Only you could have done something so stupid."

Joshua turned to his grandchildren. "Looks like you'll have to pilot Captain Starlight's ship after all. Get ready to go. And Danny..." He took Brunswick from his pocket and handed the mouse to the boy. "Might as well give this little fella back to his friend Henshaw."

"How do we get on the ship, though?" asked Lucy. "We need a picture of it and there isn't one."

Joshua pointed at the comic. "Put your hand on the next blank space, Danny."

The boy did as he was told and they watched the image of Starlight's ship appear. Surprisingly, the next blank space began to fill in all on its own. It was as well it had because it showed some of the Pyth moving along the track through the jungle. They were slow now, but they were still alive and they carried dangerous-looking clubs and spears. "Better hurry, you two," said Joshua. "Obviously

banishing Mamma Zeeta and the Pyth back into exile takes time. You have to pick up our friends from the beach before the Pyth get there.”

Following the chant of “Moonberry Pie”, in moments the children and a mouse appeared on board Starlight’s ship. Lucy went to the wheelhouse and called out: “You’re on, Danny. Do the blow-up thing and let’s pick up Henshaw and the others.”

Danny went to the wheel on the side of the ship and turned it a few times, looking up at the balloons tied above as they filled with air. Then they were rising, and with Lucy steering, the ship floated to hover over the beach. Danny turned the blow-up wheel back a bit, some air hissed out of the balloons, and the ship drifted down to settle gently on the sand.

“I don’t believe what I’m seeing,” Nuff-Nuff blurted out in amazement.

“Yes you do,” chided Henshaw. “You’ve seen it all before.”

“Have we?” asked Moonshine.

“Yes, Colonel,” the penguin butler replied. “You and Captain Starlight used to sail the ship. And you will again, once your memories return in full. In the meantime, Lucy and Danny will do your jobs for you and take us all back to Gumblyland.”

Nuff-Nuff frowned. “Gumblyland... That name rings a bell.”

Henshaw groaned. “I wonder why?” Movement caught his eye and he looked back at the jungle as the first of the Pyth appeared. “Hurry everyone. All aboard that’s going aboard.”

Lucy waited until the five comic-book characters were on deck before calling: “Do the blow-up thing, Danny, and let’s get out of here.” As they were rising she spoke to her passengers: “Prepare to enjoy the cruise of dreams. And when you wake up you might actually remember who you are; with luck, anyway.”

If it was a small revelation for Starlight, Moonshine, Nuff-Nuff and Dib-Dob, Henshaw’s greatest delight was the return of Brunswick. Taking the little mouse from Danny, he said softly: “Hello again, my tiny friend. It’s truly wonderful to see you again. And when we get home you can have as many Crunchy Corn Doo-Dads as you can eat.”

Nuff-Nuff’s eyes widened and a smile spread across his face in anticipation. “I’m pretty sure I love those.”

Henshaw regarded him with a stern look. “You do; you did; but you’d better behave yourself or it’s bread and water for you, Your Grumpiness.”

They made it safely back to Gumblyland in Captain Starlight’s ship; and after it settled down in the harbour, Lucy and Danny Moonberry-Pied back home.

“Listening to those two arguing again was just like old times,” said Lucy with a grin. She glanced down at the table where Joshua had placed the three-pointed star from Mamma Zeeta’s altar. “What do you intend doing with that, Granddad?”

Joshua narrowed his eyes at the artefact. “I know it belongs in comic-book world; but for now I think it’s best if it stays here.”

“But if we give it back to Professor Dib-Dob, he might take it on another of his adventures,” suggested Danny hopefully, “And next time they could be really HUGE.”

Lucy frowned at her brother. “Don’t you think this one was huge enough?”

Danny thought about it, but only for a moment before declaring: “Naah...!”