

Sand, the Sun Ring and the Desert Storm

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Prologue

The Sun King was dying.

By his bedside stood a weeping crowd. The King looked only at his young son. His boy looked on confused and sad. He beckoned to his child to come close.

“One day you will be able to use this - if you don't give up.” The King whispered handing over a battered book. He then struggled with weak arms to pull off a silver ring from his little finger. He passed this too over to the child.

“This is yours now.”

The King closed his eyes and went very still.

Chapter 1 Grandad's Farm

One day, some children: Michael, Rosie and Tom, arrived at their Grandad's farm. It was Michael's first time at the farm. Even though Michael was the oldest, he was adopted and had not been to the farm before. He was so excited to explore! Michael wondered if his dad had loved the outdoors as much as he did. As he thought of his dad, he played with the old silver ring on this left hand.

They were in their room unpacking. It was so cosy. The walls were painted blue. The beds were very creaky, but still so comfortable. Tom was happy because there was a mirror there. The sun shone in through the window. It was sunny but still cold. Outside the window, there were many trees, loud cow moos and the smell of horse manure. Gross! There were some birds singing little songs.

"What shall we do?" said Rosie.

"We already unpacked our bags," said Tom. "Well, we have. Michael are you ever going to unpack that?"

Michael didn't want to unpack the rest of his bag as it held the last gifts of his father: a broken portal gun and an ancient book of magic with a golden sun drawn on the front. Those, and his silver ring, were precious to him even though the portal gun was useless. Maybe Grandad could fix it. As for the spell book.. all his hours of practice had resulted in little success only one small sparkler light and a terrible headache.

"I know," said Michael coming away from his gloomy thoughts, "let's climb some trees."

"No!" cried Tom. "It will mess up my hair."

"Yeah, also there will be dogs down there," said Rosie.

"You two are wimps," said Michael.

"We are not!" yelled Tom.

"Yes, you are," said Michael.

After that, all three children sat in a separate corner, not moving or saying a word to each other, and they still didn't know what to do.

Then their Grandad walked in and said, "What are you doing, sitting here? Come on, go outside. It's lovely weather. And there are loads of trees to climb."

"But Rosie and Tom don't want to climb trees," said Michael.

"Oh come on, you two, it will be fun," said Grandad.

"Fine," said Tom. So the children went outside with their boots and gloves on.

Chapter 2 A strange discovery

As the children went outside, a cat ran past. It was chasing a mouse, but then to Rosie's horror, she saw a dog. She shrieked as she was scared of dogs because one had jumped at her once when she was very little. Michael had to cover his mouth. There were leaves of all sorts everywhere. Michael brought his little backpack with him. He was so excited to go outside, he'd forgotten to give Grandad the broken portal gun. Grandad was good at fixing things. There were loads of trees, but one in particular caught Michael's eye. It was a large oak tree with red, yellow and brown leaves.

"What?" said Rosie.

"That is way too high to climb," said Tom.

“Come on,” said Michael. “It’s not that high.”

“Hey, what about that tree?” said Rosie.

“No!” yelled Michael, “it’s too short.”

While Rosie and Michael were arguing, Tom noticed a strange glow, coming from a bush in the distance.

Tom tapped Michael on the shoulder and pointed at it. “What, on Earth, is that?” he said.

Chapter 3 Through the Portal

“Hmm, how odd. Let’s go check it out,” said Michael. So, all three children made their way to the bush.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” asked Rosie.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m sure,” said Michael.

“Err, what could it be?” questioned Tom.

“No idea,” said Rosie.

“I know,” said Tom. “It could be a mirror. I can check out my hair.”

“What now?” said Michael shaking his head at Tom’s silliness. “It looks like a portal from my portal gun, but ... it’s not from my portal gun.”

“Well, if it is, we probably shouldn’t go in,” said Rosie in a worried voice.

“Oh, come on Rosie,” said Michael happily. “You’ll get away from the dog.”

“Fine,” said Rosie.

“I still don’t think it’s a good idea,” said Tom.

“Come on, we can just look and come right back,” said Michael. “There might be mirrors and great hair care products there...”

“Alright” said Tom. So, they jumped into the portal, one by one.

Down they fell, down and down... and landed on something hard and dry. When Michael looked, he saw it was sand. They were in a desert. It was so hot. All you could see for miles was sand. It blew in your eyes and mouth. It was very unpleasant. There were some tall cacti growing in the far distance. As they were looking at the cacti, something pounced on Tom with a growl! It was a ferocious wild dog. Tom screamed. The children didn’t know what to do.

As if from nowhere, there appeared, a tall figure. She picked the dog up with her bare hands and threw it away. The dog limped off, whining.

She helped all three children get up. She shook the children’s hands. First Tom, then Rosie, but she kept hold of Michael’s hand for one second longer than the others and looked at him oddly.

The person that saved them had very wrinkly skin. She had yellow eyes, and hair dry like sand. Her dress had a sand timer design on it.

“Well, thank you,” said Tom shakily.

“What’s your name?” asked Rosie trying to remember her manners.

“My name is Sandy,” the lady replied.

“Hello Sandy, I’m Michael,” said Michael.

“Hello children. Michael, do you mind me asking where you got your ring from?” said Sandy.

Michael noticed Sandy had a couple of silver rings on her fingers too, but she quickly put her hands behind her back before he got a proper look.

“My dad gave it to me before he died,” said Michael sadly.

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Sandy. She glanced away and up at the sky. The sun was starting to set. “Come and stay at my house. You need a rest after that fright, and it’s getting dark.”

They went with Sandy to her home. It was a huge sandcastle that looked orange-pink in the setting sunlight.

Sandy showed them to their rooms.

“There’s no mirror,” sighed Tom.

“Oh, shut up,” said Michael.

“What do you want it for anyway?” said Rosie.

“To look at my very beautiful self, of course,” said Tom.

Michael, Rosie and Tom went to sleep. Rosie put her hair in a plait first, and Tom put his hair in a hair net. Michael left his hair alone, because it was short.

Chapter 4 In the Sandcastle

Next morning, all three woke up feeling dazed.

“Hey, where are we?” asked Rosie.

“We are in the sand woman’s castle,” said Michael.

“Anyone have a mirror?” said Tom. “I’m trying to do my hair.”

Sandy called them to breakfast.

“How do we find the kitchen?” asked Rosie.

“I don’t know,” moaned Michael, “and I’m hungry.”

“Maybe there’s a mirror in the kitchen?” said Tom. “Even a shiny pan would do.”

There were lots of closed doors along the grainy walls. Rosie found the kitchen.

"Hello everyone," said Sandy cheerfully. "Here's my favourite breakfast: Sand Cereal."

Oh no! they thought.

"Great, thanks! Anyway..." said Tom. "Er, what's your name again?"

"My name is Sandy."

"Oh yes, I remember," said Rosie. "Do you have any cats?"

"No. It is a bit hot for pets here," explained Sandy.

Michael looked closely at Sandy as Rosie chatted on. Sandy was wearing two heavy silver rings. They seemed to have symbols on them: one looked like fire and the other was a sand timer like Sandy wore on her dress.

"Oh, I love cats," said Rosie. "I wish there were some here. But at least there aren't any dogs."

"Yes, the wild dogs are found near the oasis," said Sandy. "You have to look out for them. Now, if you will excuse me, I have work to do so I'll see you later. Enjoy your breakfast."

Tom and Rosie began arguing about dogs.

"Come on guys, don't get side-tracked," said Michael. "We need to get out of here and find a way home."

"I'm worried about the dogs, and it's much too hot," agreed Rosie. "And sand gets in your eyes."

"And my hair!"

"We need to figure out a plan," said Michael. "I'm sick of this castle already. Sand gets in your butt."

After a while Michael said, "I have an idea. We'll go out into the desert for a walk, see if we can get back through the portal."

"But we don't know where it is!" said Rosie.

"I don't want to ruin my hair in this heat," said Tom.

"If we don't get back, you'll have no hairbrush, shampoo or conditioner," said Michael. Tom looked shocked.

"I'm suspicious of Sandy," said Michael, "so let's sneak out."

"It's burning," said Rosie, once they were outside. "I don't need sunburn or heatstroke." Michael looked in his backpack. Under his broken portal gun, he found some bug spray.

"I've got this," he said. "I thought there would be lots of bugs at the farm."

"I don't think that will help," said Tom.

Suddenly Rosie screamed, "Dogs, dogs, dogs, aargh!"

Michael sprayed the dogs with the bug spray holding them off.

"Run and get Sandy," he shouted to Rosie.

Rosie got back to the castle and banged on the door.

"Michael and Tom are being chased by wild dogs!" she cried.

"I will come right away," said Sandy.

Sandy and Rosie ran for some time. Rosie thought she saw a little grin on Sandy's face, but maybe it was her imagination. Soon, they got to Tom and Michael. Sandy threw the dog in the oasis. The dog screeched and was washed away in the water.

"Thanks!" said Michael.

"Time to come back to the castle," said Sandy.

Chapter 5 Escape

That night, when the children were sleeping in Sandy's sandcastle, Michael heard some footsteps. He peeked out of the sand door. Sandy was there. She was looking at the two rings on her fingers. She was talking to herself.

"I need that last ring from the boy, Michael. I have the Fire Ring, and the Sand Ring, but I need the Sun Ring. Then, everything will be a desert!"

Michael crept back into the bedroom. He woke Rosie and Tom and told them what he heard.

"I think she must be a witch!" said Michael.

"That's why there are no mirrors!" cried Tom. "Everyone knows a mirror will reveal a witch's true nature."

The children packed up their bags straight away and put on their clothes. They wanted to sneak out, but just as they opened the door, they heard a voice.

"Hey, where are you going?" said Sandy, harshly. Just as she said that the door slammed shut. The children were stuck in the sandcastle.

Back in their room, Michael realised one small window was open.

"Guys, Sandy forgot to lock it!" he said. The children clambered out of the window, into the cold desert night.

The next morning, Sandy looked into the children's room. No one was there! When she saw the open window, she was furious! She rushed outside into the desert. After searching all around, she saw the children in the distance. She kept running, getting closer and closer.

The children saw her over their shoulders.

“She’s coming!” yelled Rosie.

Sandy grabbed Tom. Tom was lucky he was skinny enough to slip out of her grasp.

Then Sandy conjured up a giant sand tornado. It hit all three children. Michael remembered his Dad’s magic spell book. He took it from his bag and tried to cast a calming spell.

Had it really worked for once? The wind calmed and there was no sign of Sandy.

The children ran for what felt like hours, then Rosie spotted a shiny hole in the ground. The children rushed forward - there was the portal!

They wasted no time and jumped straight in. Suddenly, they were back on Grandad’s farm.

“I’m never going to go tree-climbing again!” said Rosie.

“I’m so tired,” said Tom.

Then Michael noticed his sun ring was missing! It seemed very odd.

Chapter 6 Back at the Farm

“Oh no!” said Michael. “That Sand Witch has my ring!”

There was the sound of sand whooshing. Tom and Rosie gasped. The Sand Witch had followed them through the portal. Sand was starting to cover the hills and fields all about the farm.

“How can we fix this?” asked Tom.

“It’s a sand curse,” said Michael. “We need to get the ring off the Sand Witch, and we also have to kill her.” Rosie looked shocked.

“Either we kill her, or the whole world is an endless track of desert,” said Michael.

“Plan Desert Down,” said Michael. “One, we build a big Roman catapult. We’ll squish her like a bug! Two, Rosie can sneak in and steal

the sun ring off her finger. Then, three, I will do the final sun spell in my father’s magic book to finally defeat her. Let’s go!”

Tom and Michael set up the catapult at the entrance to the farm. They knew Sandy the Sand Witch would come after them. Rosie hid in the bushes on the other side of the lane to the boys. The farm was becoming the only part of all the countryside around them that was not covered in dry yellow sand.

“If she dodges, we have more ammo,” said Tom.

“Desert dawn action!” cried Michael.

Suddenly, Sandy was upon them. The Sand Witch had summoned a great gust of sand-filled wind. Michael and Tom had to weigh down the catapult with rocks. Then they fired the first rock at Sandy, but she dodged it using her magic. Next, she summoned a huge snake! The boys fired a rock at the snake and it crumbled into sand. Then they used the biggest rock they could find. It hit Sandy and she was knocked down.

Rosie dove in and stole the sun ring. She threw the ring to Michael. The Sand Witch was still alive and struggling to push the rock away.

Michael tried to summon a ray of sunlight. It was the sun spell. This was the most difficult spell in the battered old spell book.

Michael's dad had used it to win his throne all those years ago. Michael had never been able to cast the spell but his dad had told him never to give up. There was not much he remembered about his dad but those final words he never forgot.

He tried a second time. There was a little light, but it flickered out. The third time, he got it.

A giant ray of light came down and hit Sandy. She howled in pain. Boils, bumps and black marks appeared on her skin. She was smoking and screaming. Then it was silent. All that was left of the Sand Witch was a pile of sand.

"Well, I'm not going to trust Michael's idea of fun again," said Rosie. The children were exhausted.

"Children, bathtime!" cried Grandad. "How was your day?" he asked as they walked in to the house.

"Better now," said Tom. "I can finally wash my hair."

"Classic Tom," said Michael.

"Never change Tom, never change," said Rosie.

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Three children: Michael, Rosie and Tom are at their Grandad's farm when something very odd happens. The children fall into another dimension! They meet a mysterious stranger, Sandy, but is all what it seems and will they ever get back?

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